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COGNITIVE GRAMMAR TOOLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TENSES – THE CASE OF PRESENT PERFECT

The article discusses an application, within the sphere of foreign language pedagogy, of one of the psychological mechanisms omnipresent in language – construal (Langacker 2008: 4-5, Tomasello 2003: 13). In the first part, the article takes up two major issues: a more detailed characterization of the construal aspects in question: profile and base, as well as the problems often encountered in pedagogical grammar while referring to the uses of one of the English tenses – Present Perfect: the number of uses, the manner of defining them, and the level of schematicity at which the description should take place. The second part of the article is devoted to an analysis of the uses of Present Perfect by means of the presented Cognitive Grammar tools. In the conclusions this analysis is reviewed from the perspective of the above-mentioned problems and some pedagogical implications flowing from the model proposed by the author are discussed.

1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics has a lot to offer in the sphere of applied linguistics. First, to the interdisciplinary arena of language pedagogy it brings “a powerful conceptual unity” (De Knop, De Rycker 2008: 4). Second, it clearly states its objectives, e.g. acknowledges the significance of the construction (Robinson, Ellis 2008: 498). Or, more specifically, not the construction itself but the mutually dependent pairing: linguistic expression – conceptualization, which is additionally “interfaced with other cognitive and social systems in adult language use and language development” (ibid.: 497). Finally, it provides a rich variety of tools which can be consequently applied in the second/foreign language classroom.

This richness can be tackled with in at least two different manners. One option is to apply as much of the cognitive inventory as possible in order to formulate the pedagogical grammar of a language, which was the path chosen by Radden and Dirven (2007). The authors present the English grammar from the point of

view of the foreign learner introducing, at the same time, numerous cognitive constructs. Although such an approach clearly shows the constructs' potential, their diversity can pose serious problems on the part of the learners thus limiting the applicability of the propounded solutions. The other general option, recommended in the present approach, is to limit oneself to one theory that is, to a relatively small amount of tools and apply them consistently throughout the account of a grammar. Although such an approach limits the number of the presented cognitive tools, I consider it more appropriate for the foreign language classroom.

The theory I want to base on for this purpose is Cognitive Grammar. And it is not only because, as Broccias (2006: 108) notices, "Langacker's theory is by far the most comprehensive theory of grammar available in the cognitive linguistic camp". Equally important are the tools which Langacker introduces, that is, in the present case, construal aspects (Langacker 1987, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2007, 2008a, etc.). Although Langacker (2008b: 29) sees Cognitive Grammar as useful "especially at more advanced levels", due to the origin of this grammar and the whole Cognitive Linguistics movement – basic human cognitive abilities (e.g. Talmy 1988: 166, Talmy 2000: 22, Langacker 1987: 99-146, Tomasello 2003: 289-290, Evans, Green 2006: 15-16, Geeraerts, Cuyckens 2007: 3, etc.), that is, abilities common to all people, it seems a tool of a far greater potential. What is more, not only for the advanced but, even more importantly, also for students at the beginning stages of language learning. And this is what the present article focuses on: unifying, possibly simplifying, and visualising the account of the uses of an English tense by means of the tools introduced within CG in order to provide a sound basis for grammar instruction at the beginning stages of learning.

Before going into details of the model, one more characteristic of the Cognitive Grammar approach to language needs to be clarified: the pedagogical consequences of adopting the pairing linguistic expression-conceptualisation as inherent to language. Because an expression construes its content in a certain manner, using it "speakers are able to construe the same content in alternate ways, which may then result in substantially different meanings; in other words, construal refers to a speaker's choice between various alternatives" (Pütz 2007: 1147-1148). For language pedagogy it means that teaching should *not* be about "teaching set patterns of lexical associations" but about teaching "the conventionalised way of matching certain expressions to certain situations, as well as the flexibility of using the available alternatives to express specific semantic nuances" (Achard 2004: 185). When applied to the area of tenses, it means that the distinction between different uses of a temporal construction stems from different manners in which the same reality – the given temporal scene – is construed. In other words, while teaching a foreign language temporal construction it is not enough to enumerate its uses – it is also significant to realise how these uses relate to, and how they construe the given temporal scene.

The article is organised in the following manner: first, the key terms of the present discussion, figure/ground, as well as their Cognitive Grammar equivalents, profile/base, are introduced and defined for the purposes of tense description.

Then, the main pedagogical issues of the present discussion are dealt with in detail. What follows is an analysis of one of the English tenses – Present Perfect. The article is concluded by a summary of the findings and a conclusion.

2. The theoretical background

I wish to begin with the most general notion of the below considerations – *construal*. Langacker (2007: 435) defines it as “our multifaceted capacity to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways”. It is important to observe that construal is a vital element of the meaning of every lexical item as, apart from its conceptual content, “equally important is how that content is construed” (Langacker 2008a: 55), which places construal and its dimensions among the most significant semantic phenomena. For pedagogical purposes construal and its aspects can be applied in different fashions and in different configurations (cf. Drożdż 2008, Drożdż 2009). Here I would like to propose an application of two of them, classified by Langacker (2008a: 66-70) as dimensions of prominence: *profile* and *base*. However, before applying these constructs to the description of tenses I would like to refer to the source of these notions (Langacker 1987: 120) – the well known psychological phenomenon of the *figure* and *ground* alignment.

This latter distinction comes from a Danish psychologist, Edgar Rubin, who noticed that people *do not* perceive reality as a homogenous picture but we have an innate ability to perceive certain aspects of any given spatial scene as standing out from other parts of that scene. More specifically, as we focus our attention on certain aspects of a scene (which he called the *figure*), at the same time we tend to disregard other elements of the same scene, which constitute a kind of background for the figure (which he called the *ground*). He illustrated his observation with a vase-profile illustration (fig.1). What it shows is the figure-ground reversal: the picture can be seen either as two black faces (the figure) looking at each other on a white background (the ground) or, conversely, as a white vase (the figure) on a black background (the ground). Although we are faced with both of them simultaneously, we only focus on one of them at a time – the one we choose to be the figure. In Cognitive Grammar the figure/ground gave rise, among other things, to the notions of base, which is defined as the body of conceptual content selected by an expression as the basis for its meaning and profile, which is “what the expression is conceived as designating or referring to within its base” (Langacker 2008a: 66).

In methodology a reference to the figure/ground alignment is not new. Grundy (2004) discusses possible applications of these notions in language teaching methodology, e.g. syllabus organization or second language instruction. Here, however, I would like to follow the path proposed by Dirven (1989) and apply the terms profile and base in order to characterise the uses of a tense. More specifically, within the temporal scene underlying a use I distinguish two elements: the *profile* – the elements of the temporal scene which the use foregrounds and the *base* – the elements which are left unspecified.

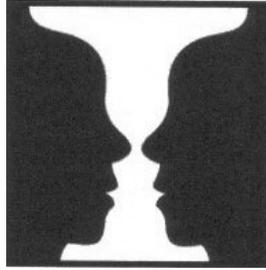


Fig. 1: The vase-profile illustration

One more comment needs to be made at this juncture: to be coherent, the uses of a tense need to be organized in some manner. A clue for this also comes from Cognitive Grammar: “whether lexical or grammatical, a symbolic element is often *polysemous*; it has not just one meaning but a family of related senses, usually clustered around a prototype” (Langacker 1995: 51). Although Langacker himself (1991: 208) in his analysis of Present Simple characterises the tense schema rather than its particular uses, in the classroom environment a network of uses seems to work more efficiently than presenting to students one, very general and abstract use of a tense.

3. Issues in pedagogical grammar

Before the analysis proper, I would like to discuss three theoretical problems often encountered within the classical approach to pedagogical grammar, and which the below cognitive analysis aims to offer solutions to. And although this discussion focuses solely on Present Perfect, these problems are symptomatic of actually any tense. Consequently, the propounded solutions are hoped to be applicable to all tenses.

The first problem is *the number of uses of the tense*. To determine this number, six grammar books written by English authors have been analysed. The result shows that the problem is real and, what is more, it is not easily resolvable. A review of the uses found in those grammar books is summarised in table 1.

Of course, such results must be approached with caution, as each of these grammar books was written with a different theoretical model in thought, which resulted in different criteria and a focus on different facets of the same tense. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), for instance, suggested just one use of Present Perfect but their analysis focused on different types of verbs and it is them that eventually account for the variation within the uses of the tense. Quite differently, Thomson and Martinet (1986) chose to highlight the process and its duration as the basis for their considerations, examined it in detail, and proposed four uses of this tense. It must

Table 1: The number of uses of Present Perfect enumerated by English authors of English grammar books.

Author(s)	The number of uses
Greenbaum, Quirk	1
Greenbaum, Nelson; Alexander	2 2
Quirk et al.	3
Thomson and Martinet	4
Leech	5

be stressed, then, that the present discussion does not aim to point to the fact that one grammar book is better or more accurate than another – its sole purpose was to determine the criteria for establishing the number of uses of the tense and its only outcome should be that there is no fixed, agreed-upon model.

The second problem I wish to discuss is *the manner in which the use of a tense is defined*. It is a more general issue as it concerns all tenses and not just exclusively Present Perfect. Thornbury (1999: 32), among several characteristics of a good grammatical rule, mentions *clarity*, by which he means avoidance of ambiguity and obscure terminology, and *limitation* – pointing to the limits on the use of a grammatical structure. In my opinion, one more parameter should be added – *distinctiveness of grammatical rules*, which means that different rules concerning one grammatical aspect should not overlap. It is a more practical postulate arising from an observation how rules are actually formulated – in the case of tenses it can be noticed that different uses of one tense are defined in a way which results in their overlapping.

Analysing some exemplary uses of Present Perfect advanced by Leech (1989: 381-382), several comments can be made:

- ”– (...) something which began in the past, and has continued up to the present;
- (...) our experience up to now in life,
- (...) something in the more recent past”

First, the author applies two different types of criteria in his rules – in the first and third use he relies on the temporal dimension of the described process while in the second he chooses human experience. I think it is rather uncontroversial that human experience accumulates both completed events as well as those that are in progress, like the experience of having been to the zoo (a completed event) and the experience of living in Poland since one’s birth (an event in progress). In other words, by applying the two criteria in what should be different uses of the

tense he implicitly proposes a limited and quite a peculiar definition of human experience: it is only the completed events from the past which we still remember, e.g. “I have visited Rio” as well as negations and questions concerning the time up to now, e.g. “I have never been to Buenos Aires” or “Has anyone ever climber that mountain?” (ibid.: 382). However, statements and question concerning actions continued up to the present are classified under the first use. Concluding, both *clarity* and *distinctiveness* of the rule are violated here – the first and second use can be regarded as different facets of the same event described simply from two different perspectives and certain sentences can be classified rather unproblematically to both of them.

A different set of problems arise from an analysis of the third use. First, stressing the importance of the more recent past does not introduce any new facet to the already outlined temporal dimension – it can be perfectly accommodated within the process that “has continued up to the present”. Consequently, it can be eliminated as unnecessary. The second problem is that this use overlaps also the second use – it might easily be classified as a non-contradictory facet of it. In other words, it cuts across the division made by the first two uses, which can be another argument for deleting it. Finally, by doing this, the author seems to highlight the significance of one of the adverbs used with the tense. However, he does not explain his reasons for favouring this specific item. By itself it does not seem a good choice, either – choosing only one adverb as the basis for defining separate uses of a tense leads to the question about the status of the other adverbs. It might also be interpreted as an urge to formulate a criterion for establishing distinct uses of a tense. A summary of the above issues can be subsumed under two violated characteristics of a good rule: *distinctiveness* and *limitation*.

Albeit difficult, it possible to avoid the above problems: a good example can be the rules proposed by Alexander (1988: 172):

- “1. To describe actions beginning in the past and continuing up to the present moment (and possibly into the future).
2. To refer to actions occurring or not occurring at an unspecified time in the past with some kind of connection to the present”.

Both of them are described by means of the same criterion: temporal, and each of them unquestionably delineates a different type of process. However, with these rules two different questions appear: the first is the already signalled problem – the number of uses of the tense. Do these two uses exhaust the potential of Present Perfect or are there any other uses? At the same time, an interesting observation can be made: if we compare the uses put forward by Alexander (ibid.) and Leech (1989: 381-382), it can be noticed that the first use proposed by Alexander embraces the three advanced by Leech. This leads to the second question related to Alexander’s (1988: 172) rules and the last of three issues which I wish to explore in the reminder of the article: an attempt to determine and characterise *the level of schematicity at which the description of the use of a tense takes place*.

4. The uses of Present Perfect – a Cognitive Grammar perspective

Now I wish to present the manner in which the uses of the Present Perfect Tense can be described and presented by means of two aspects of construal: *profile* and *base*. The first stage in doing so should be realising that all the uses of Present Perfect can be described as stemming from the same schematic, temporal scene. Within this scene at least three distinct elements need to be distinguished (fig. 4):

- the moment of speaking (the time of the speech event) which, in default cases, is the present moment,
- a point in the past before the moment of speaking,
- a link between the two.

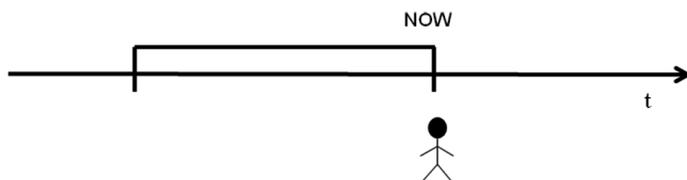


Fig. 4: The temporal scene for the Present Perfect Tense

Below, the manners of profiling this scene and, at the same time, the consequent uses of Present Perfect are discussed.

4.1. The first use

Having determined the base, it is time to focus on the profile of the action. I would like to begin with the use subsuming the processes which Alexander (1988: 172) defined as “actions beginning in the past and continuing up to the present moment (and possibly into the future)”. Two elements of the profile can be distinguished: the point in the past which delimits the beginning of the action and the time line which indicates that the process began in the past continues up to the present moment. The beginning of the process can be indicated either by means of a prepositional phrase or a clause, while the present or future moment remains implicit (fig. 5). Sentences illustrating this use can be, for instance, *My sister has had a car since Monday* or *John has done much work since he last spoke to you*.

One facet of this use should be mentioned at this point: in some cases, often accompanied by such adverbials as e.g. *always*, *never*, or *ever*, the starting point for the action can lose its profile status and assimilate with the base (fig. 6). It does not mean that the starting point disappears as, for the most part, processes described with these adverbials do possess beginnings, like with *I have always wanted that toy*. Despite the word *always*, the pragmatic reading of this sentence

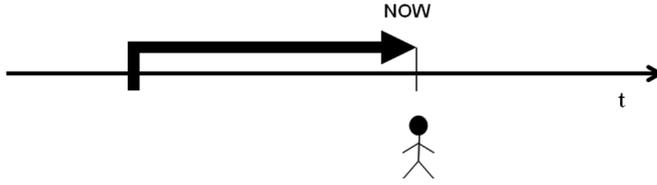


Fig. 5: The first use of Present Perfect

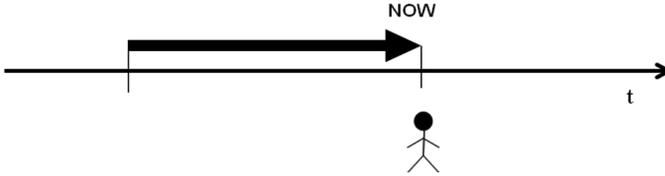


Fig. 6: A variation of the first use of Present Perfect

is that the process had a beginning, e.g. the first time the speaker saw the toy – it only changes its status and becomes implicit rather than explicit.

This shift in the profile is particularly important for Polish learners, as the starting point draws an important demarcation line: the processes with an explicit starting point are often rendered in Polish in the present tense, e.g. *Znam go od roku*, *Mieszkam tu od miesiąca*, etc. At the same time, the processes deprived of such a starting point are often rendered in the past tense, e.g. *Zawsze chciałem być aktorem*, *Nigdy mi o tym nie powiedziałaś*, *Czy kiedyś go spotkałeś?*, etc.

Concluding, the change in the profile might be an argument for formulating a distinct use of Present Perfect. However, the semantic approach advocated here indicates a different treatment – the overall affinity of both types of processes suggests they should be considered as a variation of one use rather than two separate uses.

4.2. The second use

The use which I would like to single out as the second is the one which Alexander (1988: 172) defined as “occurring or not occurring at an unspecified time in the past with some kind of connection to the present”. In this use the profile encompasses two facets of the base: the moment of the occurrence of the past action and its relation with the present moment (fig. 5). One of the important characteristics of the latter facet is that the line linking the past moment with the present is not continuous but dotted, which highlights the fact that the action does not *continue* till the present moment but is *related* to it. Illustrations of this use can be, for instance, such sentences as *I have read this book* or *John has gone abroad*.

What is meant by them is, respectively, that I finished reading the book in the past and, for some reason, I wish to indicate a relationship between this fact and the present moment. In the other sentence the process of John’s going abroad took place some time ago. However, Present Perfect focuses on a relationship which exists between that point in time and the present moment. Quite often the speaker implications of these sentences will be the fact that the speaker knows what the book is about and that John is now abroad.

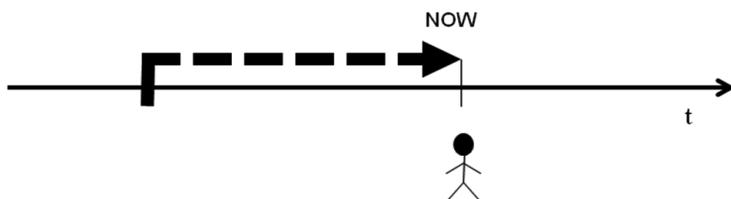


Fig. 7: The second use of Present Perfect

Before passing on to the next use it is worth mentioning that this use might have a variation, too – covering the aspect that the action can be repeated several or many times. Examples of this can be *I have watched this film many times* or *Szyborska has written many poems*. In the former sentence the speaker presumably implies the fact that he or she knows the film perfectly well, whereas in the latter the fact that Szyborska is a very famous person. This variation can be illustrated as follows:

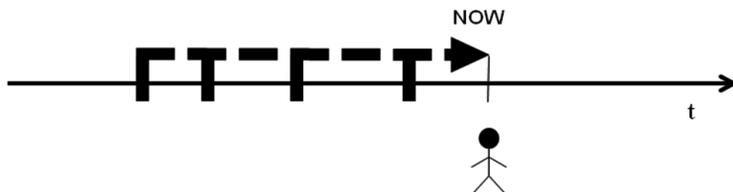


Fig. 8: A variation of the second use of Present Perfect

4.3. The third use

The third use profiles the type of process which Thomson and Martinet (1986: 167) defined as encompassing “actions occurring in an incomplete period”. Within the model proposed here the incomplete period can be defined as embracing the present moment. However, more important characteristics seem to account for the use’s peculiarity – this use, like the previous ones, also profiles actions and some time link between them and the present moment but it does so in a very specific

manner. First, in this case the time span does not begin with the occurrence of the first action – it delineates the beginning and end of the temporal frame constraining the extent of these actions. Another difference is that the actions appear in a sense *within* the profiled time frame, as illustrated in fig. 9. This facet of Present Perfect is signalled by the fact that, unlike in the first two uses, the actions are *not* linked with the frame. The last difference is that the time frame lacks directionality – the actions are not linked sequentially to lead to some implication at the present moment but are accommodated within a stable time span.

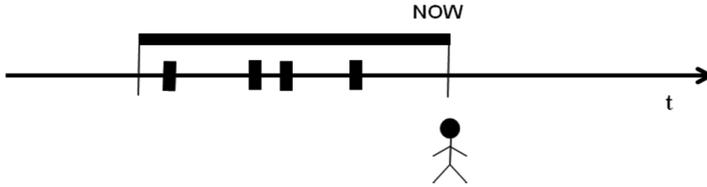


Fig. 9: The third use of Present Perfect

This use posits a serious descriptive problem: although the distinctiveness of its temporal profile sketched above makes it a fully-fledged, separate use, the examples which can be provided to illustrate it can, in some part, be the ones used in the previous use, e.g. *Szyborska has written many poems*. However, in this case the sentence does not mean that the poetess is very famous – it acquires a different reading. In the present scene, as fig. 9 shows, the poems do not form a sequence leading to the present – they are only elements subsumed under a more general time frame. In this specific case it could be the span of Szyborska's life within which she has written many poems. Consequently, one of the possible implications of this sentence could be that Szyborska is still alive and/ or that she can write even more poems. Unfortunately, the distinction between the two readings is not explicit – it relies heavily of the listener's sensitivity to the context.

Within this use also some room for variation can also be found – like the uses above, it can accommodate a single occurrence of the action within the given time frame (fig. 10). An example of this variation can be *I have spoken to Peter today*. Although the overall interpretation of the sentence can be parallel to the one with Szyborska – that the speaker can talk to Peter again because the day is not over, there is one interesting difference between the present and the previous example: the determinant of the profiled time span. In the former example it is Szyborska's life and in the latter the time frame is established by means of the adverbial *today*. Despite the fact that they both play the same function – they designate the span of time which lasts to the present moment and which can continue into the future, they are provided by different facets of the base and, at the same time, different elements of the sentence.

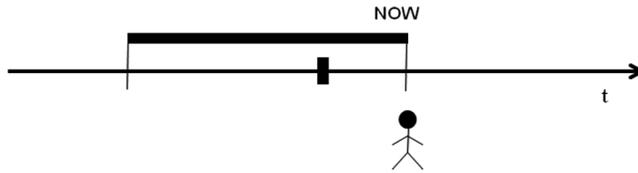


Fig. 10: A variation of the third use of Present Perfect

4.4. The fourth use

The last of the uses of Present Perfect which I would like to discuss is quite specific: some grammarians, e.g. Thomson and Martinet (1986) do not classify it together with other uses – it appears among the clauses of comparison, where the authors maintain that “the future perfect changes to the present perfect” (ibid.: 301). By adopting such an approach they make at least two important theoretical implications. The first is that in the default situation a structure (e.g. Future Perfect or Present Perfect) corresponds to a specific period in time (respectively: future and present). In other words, Present Perfect does not refer to the future – it only replaces the appropriate structure which does so. The other point is that this use of Present Perfect is not really coherent with the other uses – it is a result of a change of one tense into another. What is more, it is not even mentioned in the chapter devoted to Present Perfect.

Actually, Thomson and Martinet (1986) are not an exception – actually, most of the grammar books quoted in this article adopt a similar position on this use. However, such a stance is not the only possibility – the model propounded here handles unproblematically this seeming inconsistency and accommodates this use within the scene underlying the previous uses. Consequently, I claim that its profile highlights two components of the scene: the process which is directed towards the present moment as well as the very present moment, that is, it meshes with the other uses described above. An illustration of it can be as follows (fig. 11):

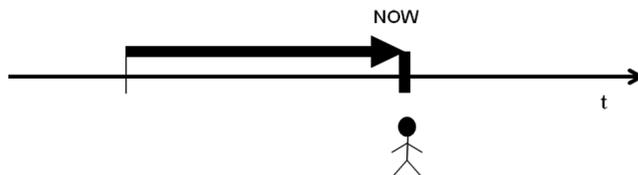


Fig. 11: The fourth use of Present Perfect

This use particularly well reflects the major characteristic associated with perfect tenses: their anteriority and relevance to the reference time (Bybee et al.

1994: 54). This reference time is particularly significant because it is then that the process finishes, like in the examples: *After I've had my tea I'm going out* or *I'll call you as soon as I've arrived home*.

The final remark which needs to be made about it concerns the time which the use concerns. It must be noted that although the analysed tense is generally classified as present, this particular use is often used to refer to the moment when an action finishes in the future, which may be the source of the above-mentioned problems with its classification. However, such a seeming inconsistency between the prototypical reference to time encoded in the structure and the time reference of one of its more peripheral uses should not be a surprise. As Quirk (1991: 176) notices, “morphologically English has no future form of the verb in addition to present and past forms”. In other words, to refer to the future English *has to* make use of e.g. present tenses through extensions of uses like this one – which profile the end of a process. Taking a more global perspective, this type of extension should be considered a constant rather than an exceptional feature of tenses because, for instance, Present Simple or Present Continuous can also refer to the future (Drożdż 2010, Drożdż in press a), Past Simple does not refer solely to the past (Taylor 2001: 207-214, Tyler, Evans 2001, Drożdż in press b), etc.

5. Conclusions

The first observation which I would like to make refers to the analytical tools – profile and base. It appeared in the course of the analysis that the construal aspects proposed by Langacker (1987, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2007, 2008a, etc.) are perfectly applicable for tense analysis as they adequately render the nuances which one can encounter in tense analysis. This, in my opinion, makes them fully-fledged linguistic tools.

I would like to discuss now the other issues raised in the article. As for the number of uses of the Present Perfect tense, the number determined within the present framework is *four*. Beside a linguistic question, a didactic one might arise about the number of uses which should be taught to students at a time. Although I do not intend to develop any definite guidelines about it at this stage, one observation needs to be made. The prevailing number of English course books applies a specific sequence of teaching these uses: at the lower stages of advancement (Elementary and Pre-Intermediate) they introduce only the uses which I enumerate as one and two. The use number three appears at the Intermediate level, and the fourth one at the Upper-Intermediate level while discussing the details of future time clauses. However, thanks to the present model of analysis it *becomes possible* to handle this problem differently – to outline the logics of the tense and introduce the whole range of uses of Present Perfect at a time without the fear of confusion or inconsistency. I believe such a holistic view might be advantageous for certain type of students, e.g. adults, who often prefer seeing the whole of the given grammatical problem rather than learning it bit by bit. Of course, such a

possibility does not entail that all of the uses *have to* be practised from the very beginning – however, in my practice I have noticed that students can profit from seeing the entire problem from the start.

Another issue which requires a comment is whether or not such a manner of defining the uses of a tense meets the conditions of a good grammatical rule. Several observations concerning it can be made on the basis of the above analysis. First, all the definitions are organised along one clear criterion: the temporal scene which can be seen in all the uses. What is more, thanks to the physical basis of the construal aspects it becomes possible to show that the difference between several uses of one tense is a result of a purely perceptual nature: the figure-ground reversal that is, shifting the profile from one set of elements of the scene to another. Adopting such a criterion has some pedagogical advantages: due to its psychological origin it is common to everyone and thanks to the visual representation it does not seem to require obscure terminology and sophisticated explanations. At the same time, it shows the real nature of language: fuzzy boundaries between different categories and, despite quite rigid definitions, some room for variation. Still another benefit, though not highlighted in the present article, is the fact that all the uses thus organised form a coherent network category (a more detailed treatment of this aspect is presented in Drożdż (2009)). Thanks to such an organisation it is possible to observe a gradual shift in the profile from one use to another in the consequent uses, which strengthens the impression of coherence. What is more, thanks to the correlation with the visual information represented in the figures the relationships between all the uses are clear at every point of their presentation.

Of course, this model does not offer a miraculous cure for all the problems appearing in didactics – while it aims to solve the known ones, it runs into some other problems. One of them is broadening the scope of knowledge which students need to refer to in order to learn to apply the given uses correctly – it is not only semantics but also pragmatics (like with the two readings of the sentence *Szyborska has written many poems*). In other words, there is no one-to-one correspondence between a structure and the scope of conceptual content which it evokes. Although it may not be easy to accept, I believe that in the long run raising language awareness by realising such a property is advantageous in the didactic process. Summing the above considerations, it seems that at least the three discussed characteristics of a good rule: clarity, limitation and distinctiveness, are preserved in the model.

The next issue I wish to address is the level of schematicity at which the description of the uses of a tense should take place so that it accommodates both accuracy and completeness. The fact that the proposed model is based on a schematic temporal scene whose different aspects are highlighted in particular uses makes the task of establishing the appropriate level of schematicity rather unproblematic. To be distinct, the uses need to be characterised along one of the two basic parameters:

- the time line and its function, that is, whether it is perceived as *the very process* lasting till the present moment (like in the first and fourth use), a

time frame within which a process takes place (the third use), or it plays the function of a *link* between a past event and the point of now,

- the profiled elements of the temporal scene underlying the uses, that is, whether the profile is the very process or time frame which it forms, the past event and its reference to the present or the process and its end.

As a consequence, any description which is more detailed or more general than these two parameters may either run into the problem of discussing too many details of the tense or, conversely, may approach its description from such a high level of schematicity that the crucial differences between the uses will be missed. At the same time, any change in these parameters will lead to a shift into another use.

Concluding, one more characteristic of the above model needs to be highlighted. If we look closely at how the profile is selected in the two variations of the third use (*Szyborska has written many poems* and *I have spoken to Peter today*), an important observation can be made: the profiled time frame in the two examples comes from two different elements of the sentence. In the latter sentence it is the adverbial *today* whereas in the former it is an aspect of the base – Szyborska's lifetime. A question may arise what to select as the profile in a given sentence. And this is where we approach the essence of the approach stemming from Cognitive Grammar: the choice of the profile does not depend on grammar rules – it depends on *speakers* and what *they* want to put in the focus of attention and eventually profile in their utterance. In other words, the description like the above is *not* meant to provide a set of rules which *have to* be followed by the user. Rather, it should be treated as a description of the construction's potential – a set of possible meanings which a construction can afford.

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