Teaching grammar to advanced learners: A cognitive perspective
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I. Some assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics:

- language is an integral part of cognition;
- language is a repertoire of symbolic units, or conventional associations of phonological structures with semantic structures; these form-meaning mappings of various complexity are situated on a continuum, whose major parameter is schematization, with elements traditionally ascribed to grammar tending to be more schematic and those assigned to lexicon having greater degree of specificity;
- there is no distinction between syntax or morphology and lexicon;
- general cognitive mechanisms are responsible for language learning – first or second;
- abstraction or schematization and categorization play a particularly important role facilitate mapping from conceptualization to expression.

There is a need for the pedagogy that would capitalize on the adult learners' conscious problem-solving mechanisms and L1 literacy to support explicit metalinguistically and metacognitively oriented instruction that draws on usage-based accounts of grammar.

II. Challenges for the learners of German associated with the use of the Dative case in clausal realm:

- unmarked, perceptually less salient;
- the use of a certain case is determined by the participant roles, selection of which depends on a particular construal of the situation; syntactic optionality of certain participants;
- English codes such roles as Beneficiary or Recipient with the help of prepositional phrases, possessive pronouns or word order; German – with Dative case:
  (1) Quickly, I described the suspect to the police officer.
      Schnell habe ich den Polizisten [Dat] den Verdächtigen beschrieben.
      Quickly have I the police officer the suspect described
  But the learners often produce sentences like (2), which are completely comprehensible to their interlocutors, but don’t sound native-like:
  (2) Schnell habe ich den Verdächtigen zu dem Polizisten beschrieben.
      Quickly have I the suspect to the police officer described.

III. Study

Goal: to investigate whether explicit meaning-based instruction incorporating metalinguistic awareness can help advanced learners acquire a wide range of meanings associated with the German Dative case.
Design: semester-long (Fall 2003); pre-, post-, delayed posttest design
Context: Text in Context, Level IV course of the Georgetown University German department’s undergraduate curriculum (taken after 18 semester credit hours of instruction).
Participants: Experimental group (N=12), Control group (N=7) – intact classes
Data: background questionnaire, free production test, fill-in-the-blanks test, written production on 3 writing tasks throughout the semester. Additionally: Experimental group participated in stimulated recall and post test interviews.

Pedagogical treatment: Experimental – 4 treatments targeting 4 Dative roles; Control – traditional syntactic-based explanation.

Dative roles targeted in instruction:

1. Recipient. Originating from a ubiquitous spatial scene depicting a transfer of a concrete object between two human participants, this role has developed metaphorical extensions not only in the realm of transfer of abstract objects, but most prominently in the realm of human communication.
   (3) Die Lehrerin gibt dem Studenten [Dat] einen Stift.
      The teacher gives a pen to the student.
      The mother tells a fairytale to the child.
2. **Beneficiary/Malefactor.** Closely related to the Recipient role, since the notion of benefit is an
extraction of giving, for the Beneficiary receives some good from the Agent.

(5) *Hans repariert mir* [Dat] *das Fahrrad.*
Hans repairs my bicycle.

(6) *Der Polizist schlug ihm* [Dat] *ins Gesicht.*
The policeman hit him in the face.

3. **Possessor.** Possession means having an object in a sphere of one’s control, often as a result of a
transfer. However, there is a number of verbs that represent the reverse process of coming into
possession, namely taking away, in which the affected entity either loses control over the previous
possession or does not possess something that is highly valued or desirable.

(7) *Um bei BMW zu arbeiten, fehlt mir* [Dat] *die nötige Erfahrung.*
I lack necessary experience to work at BMW.
4. **Experimenter**: Tied to the other roles through the notion of sphere of control or "personal sphere". Experimenter is someone who is affected by physical, mental or emotional processes, induced by an external force that lies beyond Experimenter's control.

(8) *Mir (Da) ist kalt. Or Er ist mir (Da) kalt.*
I am cold. (physical)

(9) *Das ist mir (Da) wohl bewusst.*
That is very well known to me. (mental)

(10) *Mir (Da) ist Angst und Spannung.*
I am scared. (emotional)

**Outside force ("et") = Agent**

### IV. Results

1) **Free production test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Delayed test</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
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**Group Performance on Free Production Test**

![Graph showing performance improvement](image)

**Paired T-test results (Exp. vs. Control, Post vs. Delayed)**

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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.009</td>
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2) **Open-brackets test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Delayed test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Group Performance on Open-Bracket Test

Pair T-test results (Exper. Present vs. Exper. Delayed):
Group: n  Mean  s.d.  t-value  df  p (p<0.05)
Present 12  96.5  20.3  -8.0022  11  0.003
Delayed 12  74.1  17.9

References:


