

# Explicit Form-Focussed Pedagogies in Hybrid Contexts

*Samantha Austen and Jo Fayram*

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*Starting from a justification of explicit approaches to grammar teaching, this article discusses grammar materials used within a hybrid learning context at the Open University in the United Kingdom and the cognitive principles reflected in their design. The authors argue that as part of a socio-cognitive theoretical approach, explicit form-focussed grammar instruction is not only desirable but may also be essential to meet the diverse needs of students within any language learning context. Since the Covid pandemic, the pedagogical landscape has changed, with more organizations offering hybrid approaches to language learning. In such contexts, the authors argue that the more “explicit” the online component of the blend, the more likely it is to facilitate “noticing,” which is one essential component of the development of grammatical competence. The authors draw on a cognitive linguistic framework and their own research to support the importance of explicit grammar pedagogy, prior to providing examples of grammar materials developed for language students at different levels at the Open University. They conclude by suggesting that the cognitive principles reflected in the design of these materials can be applied to any language learning context and may therefore be useful not only to language educators in Canada but also to teacher developers.*

*Partant d’une justification des approches explicites de l’enseignement de la grammaire, cet article examine le matériel pédagogique grammatical utilisé dans un contexte d’apprentissage hybride à l’Open University au Royaume-Uni et les principes cognitifs reflétés dans sa conception. Les auteurs soutiennent que, dans le cadre d’une approche théorique sociocognitive, l’enseignement explicite de la grammaire centré sur la forme n’est pas seulement souhaitable, mais qu’il peut aussi être essentiel pour répondre aux besoins diversifiés des apprenants dans n’importe quel contexte d’apprentissage des langues. Depuis la pandémie de Covid, le paysage pédagogique a changé et de plus en plus d’institutions proposent des formules hybrides d’apprentissage des langues. Dans de tels contextes, les auteurs soutiennent que plus la composante en ligne de la formule est « explicite », plus elle est susceptible de faciliter la « prise de conscience », qui est une composante essentielle du développement de la compétence grammaticale. Les auteurs s’appuient sur un cadre linguistique cognitif et sur leurs propres recherches pour soutenir l’importance d’une pédagogie grammaticale explicite, puis ils fournissent des exemples de matériel pédagogique grammatical développé pour des apprenants de langues de différents niveaux à l’Open University. Ils concluent en suggérant que les principes cognitifs reflétés dans la conception de ce matériel peuvent être appliqués à n’importe quel contexte d’apprentissage des langues et peuvent donc être utiles non seulement aux enseignants de langues au Canada, mais aussi aux formateurs d’enseignants.*

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*Keywords:* cognitive linguistics, explicit grammar teaching, hybrid learning, noticing, socio-cognitive linguistics

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Grammar teaching has a contested history. Different pedagogical approaches have been underpinned by developments in linguistic theory, applied to language teaching. In instructed settings, pedagogical approaches have developed from early methods, which focused on teaching grammatical constructions, such as grammar translation and audiolingualism, to communicative language teaching and later task-based approaches, in which the importance of meaning-focussed, relevant contexts was highlighted. Key to the evolution of these approaches has been the development of theory related to how languages are processed, stored, and applied.

Based on L1 acquisition research, Krashen (1981a) was the first to provide a coherent theory of SLA. Krashen's input hypothesis claimed that explicitly learned knowledge had limited applicability to the SLA process, as students needed to acquire an additional language implicitly in the same way as the L1. He posited that there was no interface between the two knowledge stores (learned and acquired knowledge) and that explicitly taught content was therefore useful only as a monitor to edit acquired language (Krashen, 1981b). Acquisition would be fostered by exposing learners to input a little beyond their level, or *roughly tuned comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1985). Pedagogical approaches that reflected this—for example, strong versions of the communicative approach—would not, therefore, include explicit teaching of grammatical forms (R. Ellis, 2003; Howatt, 1984).

In contrast to theories based on L1 acquisition, other theorists maintained that L2 learning is fundamentally different to L1 learning because L2 learners vary in the level of success that they achieve and, as L1 acquisition is essential for communication and socialization, it is necessarily linked to child cognitive development. As children develop language, they also develop the concepts and functions related to that language (Ibbotson, 2020; Tomasello, 2003). This is in contrast to the L2, where learners map a new language system onto already established functions and concepts from their L1(s) (Luo, 2021; Slabakova, 2013). Moreover, the L2 learner may have limited exposure to the L2, meaning that there is insufficient time for the grammar of the language to be acquired through implicit processes alone. This implies that L2 learners would need a different type of input in order to develop competence in the target language and paved the way for more explicit approaches which, this paper will argue, are important for the development of grammatical competence.

In the first section of this article, we start by defining some key concepts. We then explore the relevance of cognitive and sociocultural approaches to SLA and the pedagogy of grammar from both historical and current perspectives. We explain what we mean by cognitive approaches and how they interface with sociocultural contexts. Our approach to grammar teaching draws on cognitive linguistics (CL) and is grounded in an understanding that we are all products of our sociocultural and linguistic contexts, and consequently the meanings that we make will be intrinsically shaped by our personal situations and interactions. Therefore, the underlying theoretical framework of this paper is socio-cognitive (Croft, 2009).

In the second section, we examine online pedagogies for grammar teaching in hybrid contexts at the Open University (OU), which we consider in the light of the theory presented. Despite the fact that post pandemic, some educational organizations in Canada have reverted predominantly to classroom teaching, others have increasingly taken a hybrid approach to course delivery (for example, see Cummings & Fayed, 2022), which renders this article pertinent to Canadian contexts. The materials presented in this article were designed primarily for online teaching in hybrid environments, and we contend that the principles of CL, as reflected in materials and course design, are applicable to any context—hybrid or face-to-face.

In the final section, we return to a discussion of CL and its application to grammar teaching as part of an overall socio-cognitive approach to SLA. Within such an approach, language development

is viewed as a constantly evolving, iterative process of interaction between cognition and the environment (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). We make suggestions concerning materials and course design and conclude by recommending an approach underpinned by CL and situated within the sociocultural and/or technological context of the learner. We argue that there should be explicit elements incorporated in both pedagogy and course planning in order to trigger cognitive abilities involved in language learning.

## Literature Review

### *Definitions*

In this section, we provide working definitions and explanations of key terms as we use them in this article.

**Hybrid learning:** Sometimes referred to as “blended learning,” this is a teaching and learning approach defined as offering a mix of face-to-face, online, and/or telephone instruction.

**Grammar:** “Grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints” (Larsen-Freeman, 2009, p. 521).

**Grammatical construction:** A grammatical construction consists of not only syntactic and morphological information, but also semantic, conceptual, and pragmatic elements (Croft, 2001, p. 18; Croft & Cruse, 2004).

**Grammar teaching:** This usually involves both *inductive* and *deductive* approaches to teaching the rules of language. Deductive approaches align with an explicit focus on form such as teaching the rules of the language through metalanguage and description of the component parts of the grammatical construction and its functions. An inductive approach means helping students induce the rules of the language from spoken and written examples and is aligned with an implicit approach to teaching. Inductive grammar teaching can be part of an overall explicit approach. For example, students may be asked to induce grammar rules which are then discussed explicitly in class with the teacher.

### *Beyond Dichotomies*

Cognitive and sociocultural approaches to SLA tend to be presented as opposing theoretical paradigms in the literature (R. Ellis, 2010; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Like others (R. Ellis, 2016; Gold, 2021), we challenge this opposition, as both have their place in language teaching and learning and can be used alongside each other in language-teaching pedagogies. However, we contend that CL can be particularly useful as a theoretical framework when applied to the pedagogy of grammar (Achard, 2018). In this context, we also argue that oppositions between explicit and implicit pedagogies based on a hypothesized strong, weak, or no interface between explicit and implicit knowledge stores in the mind are erroneous. Arguments seemingly in favour of the existence of an interface were based on the observation that grammatical structures taught explicitly would not be used appropriately by students straight away, and therefore explicit teaching would not lead to language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). However, when language acquisition is viewed as a developmental, iterative process (Larsen-Freeman, 2019), the production of inaccurate forms would necessarily be a part of this process.

Likewise, implicit form-focussed instruction (where students do not explicitly focus on grammatical forms) does not necessarily lead to the acquisition of correct structures (N. Ellis, 2008). If

language learning is no different from any other learning process, given that it will be achieved through the triggering of the same general cognitive processes (Croft & Cruse 2004), then these cognitive abilities become the interface between teaching and language learning. Within this CL perspective, both explicit and implicit pedagogies can be effective in grammar teaching, although we suggest that explicit form-focussed instruction will be an essential part of this overall approach.

### *Cognitive Linguistics and Grammar Teaching*

Specifically, where grammar teaching is concerned, it can be useful to have an understanding of the cognitive processes underlying the learning of grammatical structures as explicated within a CL framework. This is because in CL, grammar and conceptualization are inextricably linked through construal (Croft & Cruse, 2004). *Construal* refers to our way of viewing an event, situation, or process—in other words, our conceptualization of it—and this occurs as a result of the interplay of a number of general cognitive abilities or non-linguistic processes called construal operations (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Evans, 2012, p. 78). As we learn grammar in a new language, we also learn how the speakers of that language construe different situations using four general cognitive processes described by Croft and Cruse (2004). The four processes implicated in construal are

- (1) attention/salience;
- (2) judgement/comparison;
- (3) perspective/situatedness; and
- (4) constitution/gestalt

These are the types of cognitive operations that come into play when a conceptualization is formed. Category 1 (attention/salience) refers to the human ability to select elements of a scene on which to focus as well as the level of attention that is given to the various elements. Category 2 (judgement/comparison) refers to our capacity for comparing two entities in terms of their similarities and differences and categorizing them. Category 3 (perspective/situatedness) refers to the construction of the event in terms of the spatial and temporal location of the speaker. It involves the speaker's viewpoint in terms of location and personal and temporal deixis. Category 4 (constitution/gestalt) represents the basic conceptualized structure of the scene: it means putting the elements together and giving it a structure or a gestalt (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 63), which may be stored and reapplied to new situations.

When CL principles are integrated into grammar teaching, these cognitive operations may be triggered in students as they develop their construal of a situation and the target language form linked to it (Littlemore, 2009). For example, category 1 operations would involve noticing or paying attention to grammatical constructions, while category 2 would involve comparing and contrasting these constructions and their real-world referents with existing knowledge of similar constructions either in other languages or in the L1 and categorizing them. In CL, the act of categorization hinges on the notion of the prototype (Rosch, 1973; Taylor, 2019). A prototype is the category member that “exhibits the maximum number of attributes which are diagnostic of category membership” (Taylor, 2019, p. 129). Category members are added through an evaluation of their similarity or distance from the prototype.

The third and fourth operation types would involve making sense of the grammatical constructions in relation to all aspects of the context, including time and space, within which the learner is situated, and the configuration of an internal representation of the construction. The configuration is contextually developed and applied. Within pedagogical contexts, these cognitive processes may occur simultaneously or overlap, although the first category (attention/salience) must necessarily be prioritized in the classroom, given its “centrality” for learning (Schmidt, 2001, p. 1).

For the learner, cross-linguistic differences in construal systems, particularly in respect to categorization (assigning a construction to a particular category in the mind) and perspective-taking (categories 2 and 3) can be difficult (Littlemore, 2009) and subject to interference (Austen & Jarvis, 2021).

When we speak our L1, we have a plethora of constructions available to us to match to our conceptualization of an event or situation, which we seek to describe. We are able to manipulate our L1 automatically to reflect our particular perspective. In L2, however, especially where cross-linguistic differences exist in relation to construction semantics and the conceptualizations to which they are linked (Austen & Jarvis, 2021), these processes can break down and meanings can be unclear or potentially unavailable to the speaker.

Moreover, students are sometimes required to learn non-prototypical functions of a semantic category first, as these may be the functions that are most commonly used. For example, in relation to the present simple, prototypical functions are those that express actions that are most closely linked to the core semantics of the construction; that is, it is present—happening in the present (Leech, 1998, p. 5), completive—the action is over (Hewson, 1991, p. 515), and stativizing—expressing a state of being (Michaelis, 2006, p. 1).

In the examples below, which show the functions of the English present simple, sentences 1 and 2 most closely align with these core semantics and could be termed prototypical (Taylor, 2019), whereas 3, 4, and 5 are more loosely related and as such are not prototypical. For example, albeit present, sentence 5 is not necessarily happening now; it is not completive and expresses a habitual state (Austen, 2016). Problems may arise when the less prototypical uses of the present simple are taught first as they align with pragmatic use (e.g., habitual use, as in sentence 5). These uses may not logically correspond with the conceptualizations of the present that the learner has either from their L1 or in their developing L2. A CL framework that explores construction meanings and how they are formed and stored may therefore provide useful insights into why students might find it difficult, for example, to understand when to use the present simple and present progressive.

- (1) I accept your terms. (Performative use)
- (2) And he scores! (Instantaneous use)
- (3) I like pasta. (Permanent state)
- (4) Hydrogen is the lightest element. (Eternal truth)
- (5) She walks to work (Habitual use)

The learner needs to be made aware of salient features of L2 grammar, including, for example, how grammatical constructions may relate to and differ from prototypical functions in the L2 meaning-making system. This may be achieved through a pedagogical approach that fosters the use of the cognitive processes detailed above, of which, as previously stated, attention/salience (category 1) (Littlemore, 2009; Schmidt, 2010) will have primary importance.

Schmidt (2001, p. 1) defined “noticing” as the “subjective correlate” of attention. He hypothesized that the process of learning a new construction involved first *noticing* that construction in input (Schmidt, 1990, 2001). Noticing may be achieved through direct instruction about particular grammatical constructions; however, in the course of language learning, noticing may occur at different levels of consciousness (Schmidt, 1990). Explicit teaching of grammatical rules and their meaning can therefore enable the cognitive processing of immediate input and/or enable the retrieval of subconsciously obtained information. Thus, some explicit teaching of grammatical concepts in L2 may be a necessary condition for the acquisition of grammar in instructed settings (Larson-Freeman, 2019; Littlemore, 2009). When online and hybrid contexts are considered, explicit grammar teaching may be even more important. In the following section, we discuss such contexts.

### *Online Learning*

As stated in the introduction, in the past 20 years, and particularly since the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the number of organizations offering online or hybrid instruction (Fayram et

al., 2024b). For the purposes of this article, we focus on the online component of teaching, which may also contain a face-to-face element.

Readily available, cost-effective platforms such as Zoom, Teams, Adobe Connect, Moodle, or Google Classroom can be used to supplement face-to-face delivery with synchronous (real-time) online classes. Asynchronous resources (e.g. blogs, forums, learning materials), accessible to students at any time, can also be made easily available using Teams, Moodle, or Google Classroom.

The pedagogy of online language learning has been extensively researched (Fayram et al., 2024a; Stickler, 2022; Stickler et al., 2020). It was Chapelle (2003) who originally called for the application of cognitive SLA theories to computer-assisted language learning (CALL), but she has been criticized for underestimating the role of sociocultural aspects, particularly in the face of rapidly evolving technologies (Kern, 2006). More recently, online interaction, including mediation by all online participants and online tools, resources, and functionalities, has been conceptualized predominantly within a sociocultural framework (Kern, 2014). Issues such as the “transactional distance” (Moore, 2018) engendered by the absence of the physical presence of participants have led to an emphasis on the importance of interaction and communication online, in which and through which it is hypothesized that learning takes place (Lantolf et al., 2015).

Undoubtedly, narrowing the gap in transactional distance between online participants is important when learning online, and particularly when learning a language. Within a sociocultural SLA theoretical framework, language learning necessarily includes communicative interaction in the target language, involving collaboration with others (Meskill, 2013). However, within online contexts, the absence of contextual cues to support meaning may also necessitate explicit teaching methods. Moreover, students need to learn how to manage multimodal aspects of online interaction (e.g. images, emoticons, and audio-visual functionalities) in addition to learning a language, which may result in cognitive overload (Warrick, 2021) and inattention, impacting negatively on learning. Therefore, facilitating the cognitive processing of language through explicit input, which enhances the salience of specific grammatical features, may be particularly relevant online (Fayram, 2017). In the following section we revisit the role of cognition in relation to online grammar pedagogy at the Open University.

## **Grammar Teaching at the Open University**

### *Context*

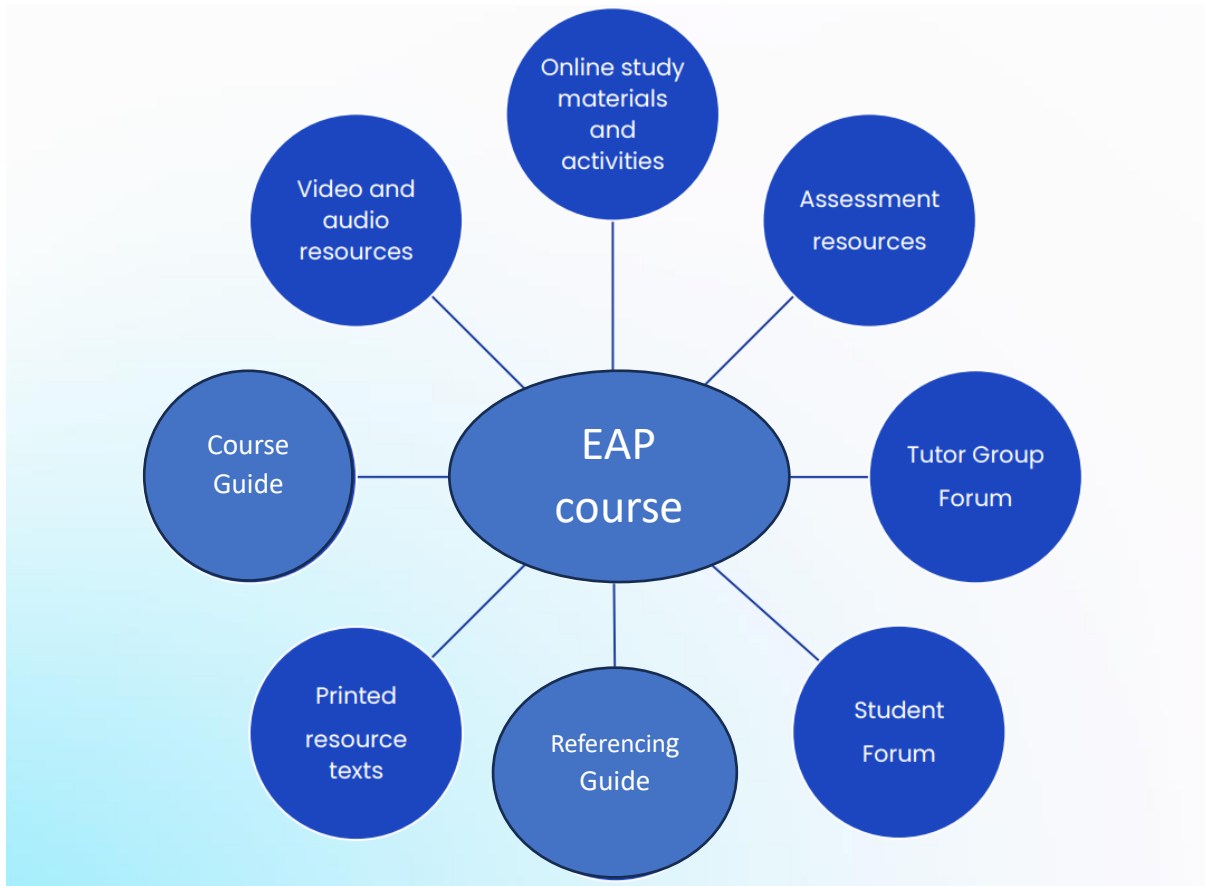
The OU is the largest distance-learning organization in the United Kingdom, and the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics (LAL) offers a range of single and combined degrees in French, Spanish, German, English, and Applied Linguistics. In addition, the school offers discrete courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Business and Management Communication at level 1 (undergraduate). It also provides individualized one-to-one EAP sessions for students across the OU curriculum (all faculties). LAL has longstanding expertise in the provision of online distance learning for languages in terms of both online pedagogy and research.

The study context is increasingly online; however, some hybrid teaching is offered for language courses, combining both online and face-to-face delivery in a 70:30 ratio, respectively. Online synchronous tutorials and asynchronous forums provide activities that complement the self-access Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)-based course materials. All course materials and resources are located on the VLE course website, which acts as a one-stop shop for students. Figure 1 shows the resources accessible to a student studying an EAP course from the course website.

Students work through the VLE course materials and activities independently, participate in forum activities in tutor groups, and attend regular integrated skills tutorials, either online or face-to-face, which aim to provide opportunities to reinforce and practise what they have learned in the course materials. The platform currently used for online tutorials is Adobe Connect. The OU uses this platform for all programs and courses, and the cost is covered by the university.

Figure 1

VLE Resources Used at the Open University



Similar to other online classrooms, the Adobe Connect interface provides the students and teacher with a variety of tools and functionalities such as emoticons, breakout rooms, video and microphone, interactive whiteboard, application sharing, and file and document sharing. There is also a chat box where students and teachers can post written content.

*Grammar Teaching Methodologies*

There are four distinctive online methodological approaches to teaching grammar at the OU, which employ a combination of deductive and inductive methods within an overall explicit approach to grammar teaching. First, structures and their functions are integrated within the thematic content of our self-access materials and are also separately highlighted within language boxes. Second, we have “learning bites,” which direct students outside the immediate course materials and provide additional explanations and practice activities for course content, including grammatical rules and constructions. Third, we offer discrete grammar workshops that are the same length as tutorials (approximately one hour) but focus specifically on interactive activities and the practice of grammatical structures and functions in context. Fourth, we also provide discrete screencasts, which provide explicit instruction

via a digital recording of computer screen output. All resources can be accessed multiple times by students as part of an iterative approach to language learning.

Each approach is considered in turn in this section and mapped to the CL framework used in this article. The mapping process needs to be viewed as approximative rather than exclusive of other possible interpretations. Although the examples given have been drawn from different target languages, the approaches used are transferable to ESL contexts.

## VLE Materials

Grammar is presented in context, either inductively by asking students to notice grammatical constructions in listening or reading texts prior to explicitly presenting the rules, or the rules are presented first and then practised in activities or exercises related to the thematic content of a unit. Morphemes may be highlighted to foster noticing, and metalanguage is used. Each grammatical construction is practised through multi-part activities. Following each activity, answers and models are provided in addition to more detailed comments and explanations. Students need to first attempt an activity before the VLE functionality enables access to answers and comments.

Students work through the VLE materials as and when they wish, independently of the tutor and other students. In the example below (Figure 2), students are studying a unit about introducing themselves and greeting others. The linguistic focus of the unit is the appropriate use of language in different social contexts. Students are already familiar with the grammatical forms but not with the contextual use of these forms.

In Figure 2, students are learning the differences in use between *tu* and *vous* in French. In the activity box (Activité 1.1.3), a brief explicit account of these differences is presented. Students are then asked to notice (construal category 1) the difference in use in context between *tu* and *vous*, based on their understanding of a situation in the form of an image, accompanied by short dialogues (Étape A: Step A).

The teaching materials then focus in more detail on the sociocultural contextual use of *tu* and *vous* via a language box highlighted in blue (Figure 3). Each grammar point is presented explicitly in blue grammar boxes throughout this course to alert students to the type of information they are about to receive. In this example, the use of *tu* and *vous* is also expressed diagrammatically in relation to the concept of distance from the speaker and their relationships with others. Using the diagram, students notice when *tu* and *vous* are used and relate these uses to the comparative proximity of others in their social context. The use of colour is also significant. A warmer shade of green signifies closer relationships, which would necessitate the use of *tu* (construal categories 1 to 3).

In Étape B (Step B), Figure 4, the students are then invited to compare the use of 'tu' and 'vous' with linguistic conventions employed in social contexts within their own cultures (construal category 2). This then fosters an awareness of the appropriacy of the use of linguistic forms in relation to sociocultural context. This is particularly important when the conceptual distinction may not exist in the students' L1 or languages with which they are familiar.

## Grammar Tutorials

These tutorials have been integrated as part of the teaching strategy on language courses to better prepare students to participate in integrated skills tutorials by reviewing grammatical content. Student feedback about the effectiveness of these tutorials, targeted at beginner- and intermediate-level language students, has been overwhelmingly positive. Here we provide a snapshot of student responses to a survey question about what they found particularly useful about the workshops.

Figure 2

VLE Materials: Example 1

### Activité 1.1.3 Choosing between *tu* and *vous*

As you saw in *Activité 1.1.1* there are two ways of addressing people in French and of translating the English word ‘you’: a formal way, using *vous*, and a less formal way, using *tu*. In this activity, you will learn about this important aspect of greetings and learn the difference between *tu* and *vous*.

#### Étape A

Look at the two pictures and read the accompanying dialogues. Why might people in one situation use the *vous* form of address and those in the other use the *tu* form? Make some brief notes to record your thoughts.



**Dialogue 1**

- Bonjour madame. Vous allez bien ?
- Oui, merci. Et vous ?
- Oui, très bien.
- Enchantée de vous rencontrer.



**Dialogue 2**

- Salut.
- Salut. Tu t’appelles comment ?
- Jules. Et toi ?
- Martin.

All students enjoyed explicit grammar explanations, which extended those given in the course material. The following two students (1 and 2) spoke about how the grammar workshops enabled them to apply their grammatical knowledge in real-life situations. Student 2 also valued the use of explicit metalanguage to recognize and name structures.

Explanations from the tutor. Getting answers about quirks that the course / other books etc didn't seem to cover. Getting a sense of how the grammar works in real life. (Student 1)

How to recognise a structure and be able to name that structure which should then follow in being able to apply it. (Student 2)

Figure 3

VLE Materials: Example 2—Language Box

### Language point 1.1.3 The use of *tu* and *vous*

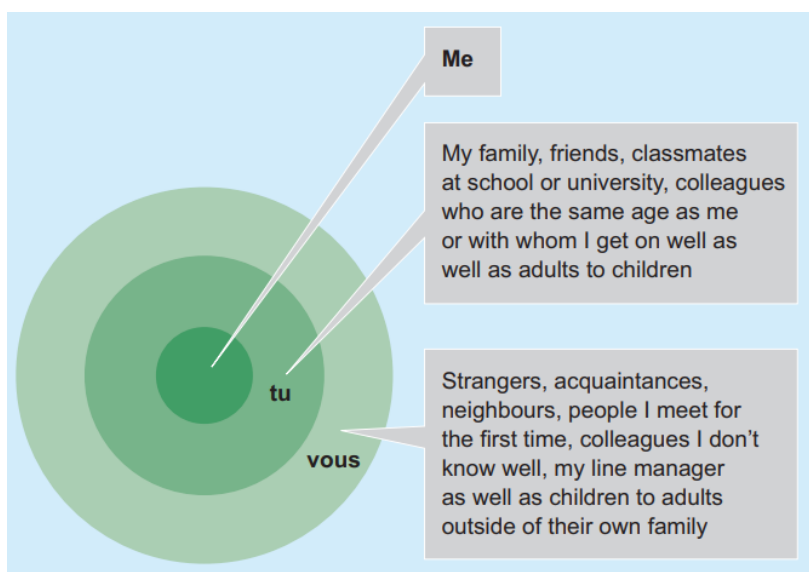
When people greet each other in French, or in any other interaction, they can address one another either as *tu* or *vous*. Both *tu* and *vous* can be used to mean ‘you’; note that in France:

- *vous* is more formal than *tu*, and is used particularly when the speaker wishes to address the listener respectfully; this may be due to differences in age or perceived status, or in more formal situations such as when meeting someone for the first time.
- *tu* is normally used among friends and relatives, and when talking to children. Teenagers and young adults will more naturally use the *tu* form from the outset between themselves.
- *Et vous ?* and *Et toi ?* are used to say politely ‘And what about you?’.

The choice between *tu* and *vous* is deeply linked to social and cultural conventions. The principles above apply to social interactions in France; they can differ in other French-speaking countries.

There are no hard and fast rules as it also depends on the setting, the person you are talking to and how formal you prefer to be. It’s always safer to use *vous* and wait for the person you are speaking with to invite you to use *tu*.

The figure below illustrates that the use of *tu* can be associated with ‘proximity’ and *vous* with ‘distance’. In other words, *tu* is for the people you are, or feel, close to, and *vous* is for the people with whom you want to put some distance.



## Figure 4

### VLE Materials: Example 3—Additional Activity

#### Étape B

Compare the use of *tu* and *vous* in French with conventions in your own language(s) and culture(s). Is there a similar distinction in language between formal and informal forms of address? Are marks of social distance or respect expressed differently? If so, how? Briefly reflect on these questions and make some notes.

Student 3, below, recognizes the value of incorporating discrete grammar workshops as part of an overall teaching strategy. They also recognize the importance of explicit grammar teaching:

I found that the grammar workshops were the missing element at the very first stages of my studies, I think I would have had benefited of this type of tutoring from the beginning of my L194 (Beginners Spanish course) also. This is a very important part of learning a new language from the start and the tutors were so helpful and knowledgeable. (Student 3)

The screenshots in Figures 5 and 6 were taken from a Beginners' German grammar workshop. The tutor has already presented and practised the forms of the present tense in German. In this sequence of examples, she draws the students' attention to the position of the verb in different sentence types. These can be difficult for English learners because German word order varies considerably depending on other grammatical structures in the sentence.

In Figures 5 and 6, the students are invited to identify the verb (construal category 1) from a list of statements and questions (some containing adverbial phrases) and then underline it using whiteboard marker tools.

Following this, the tutor highlights each verb and explains its position according to the structure of the sentence (Figure 7). She uses the whiteboard pointer to highlight both the position of the verb and whether it falls into word order position 1 or 2, as explained in the blue box at the bottom of Figure 7. The students identify the position of the verb as it is used in statements and open or closed questions (construal category 2). Finally, they are encouraged to apply their newly conceptualized understanding of word order (construal category 4) to express personal preferences in relation to food and drink (Figure 8).

#### Learning Bites

These are activities presented within the VLE but separate from the main content of a course. Learning bites complement the teaching content of a particular unit of a course by providing further explanations and practice of a relevant teaching point. Each learning bite represents one to two hours of study time. Given that students work through the VLE materials at their own pace in our context, they can choose to access the learning bites at any time. However, they are embedded within an online study planner at relevant points in relation to the language functions they are focussing on at a particular point in the course. The example below is a grammar-focussed learning bite on the tense system, which is taken from an English for academic purposes course. It complements the overall thematic content of a session on autobiographical and biographical recounts.

Figure 5

Screenshot 1: Students Identify Verbs in Statements and Questions

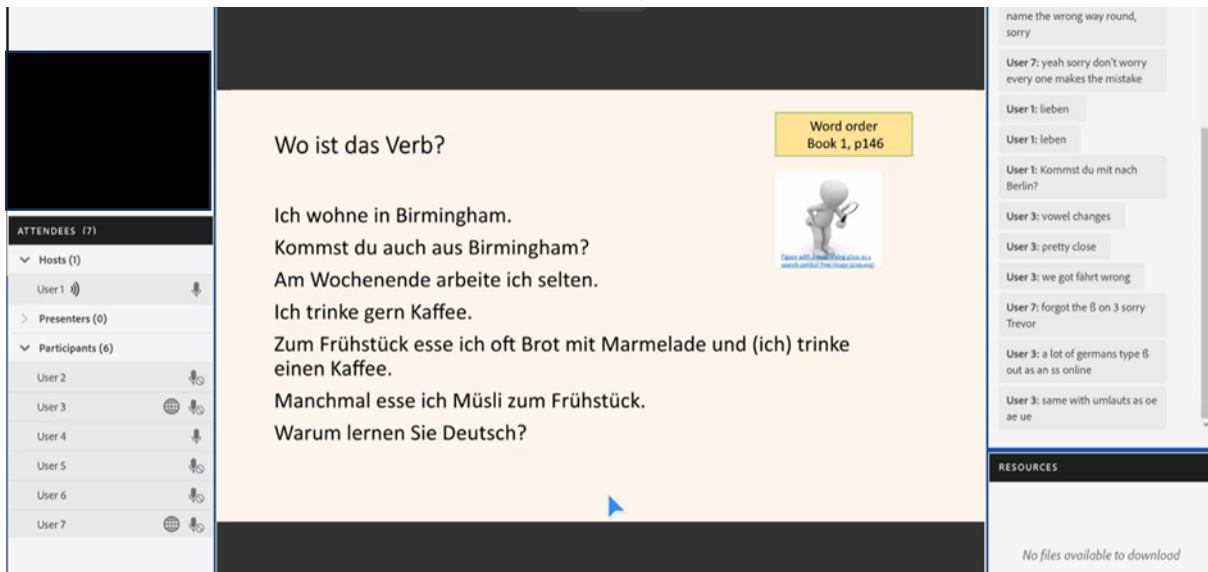


Figure 6

Screenshot 2: Students Use Whiteboard Tools to Underline the Verb in Statements and Questions

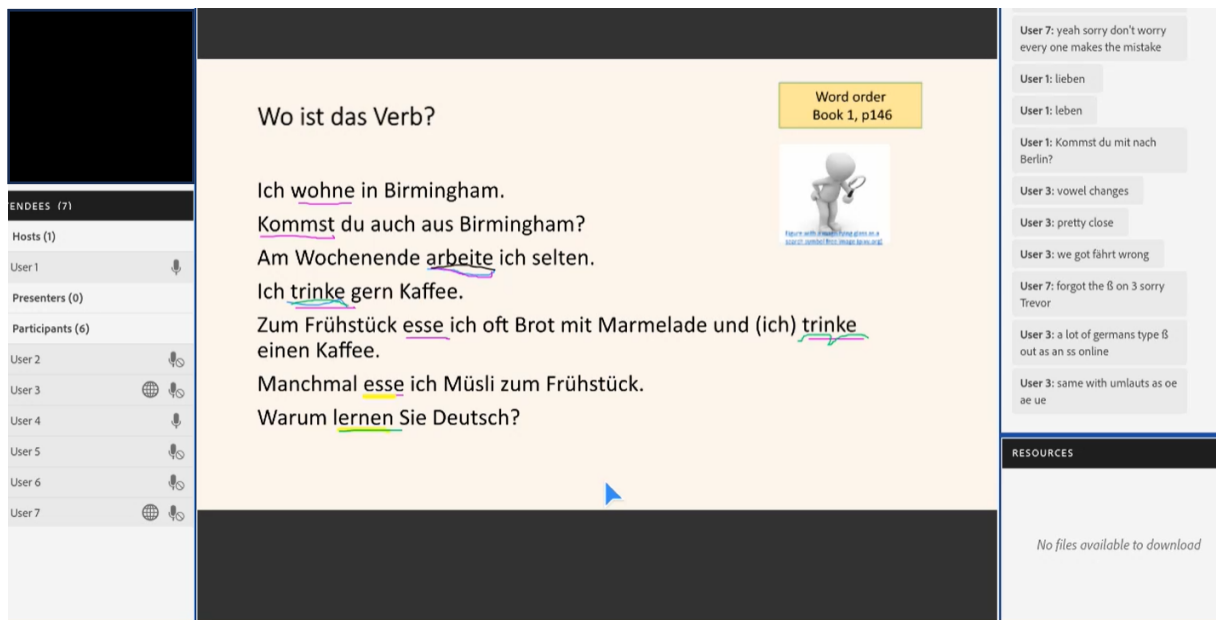


Figure 7

Screenshot 3: Teacher Highlights Verb and Explains Its Position Using the Whiteboard Pointer

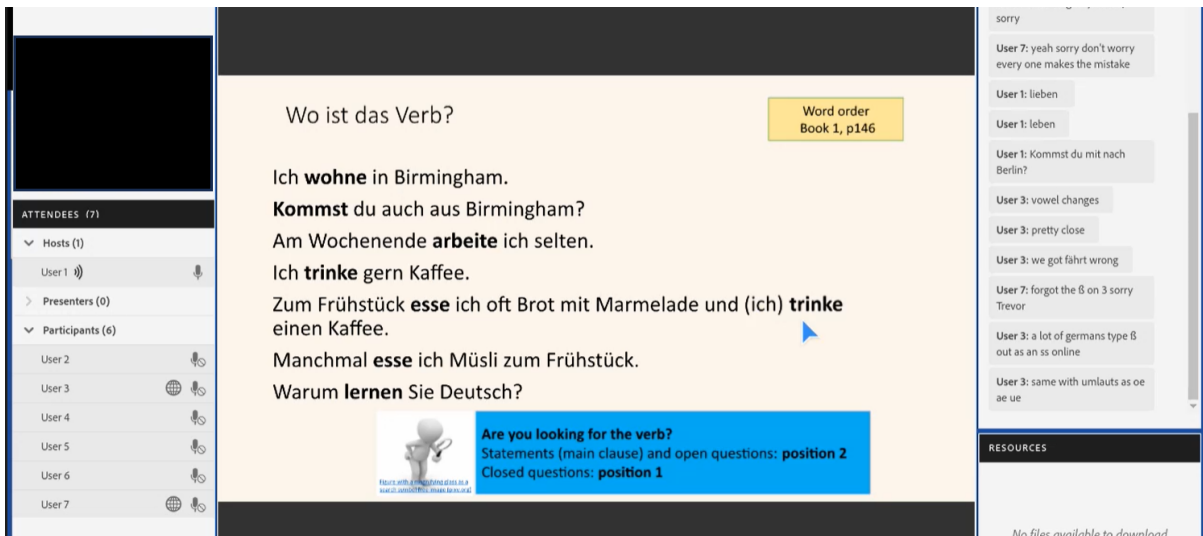
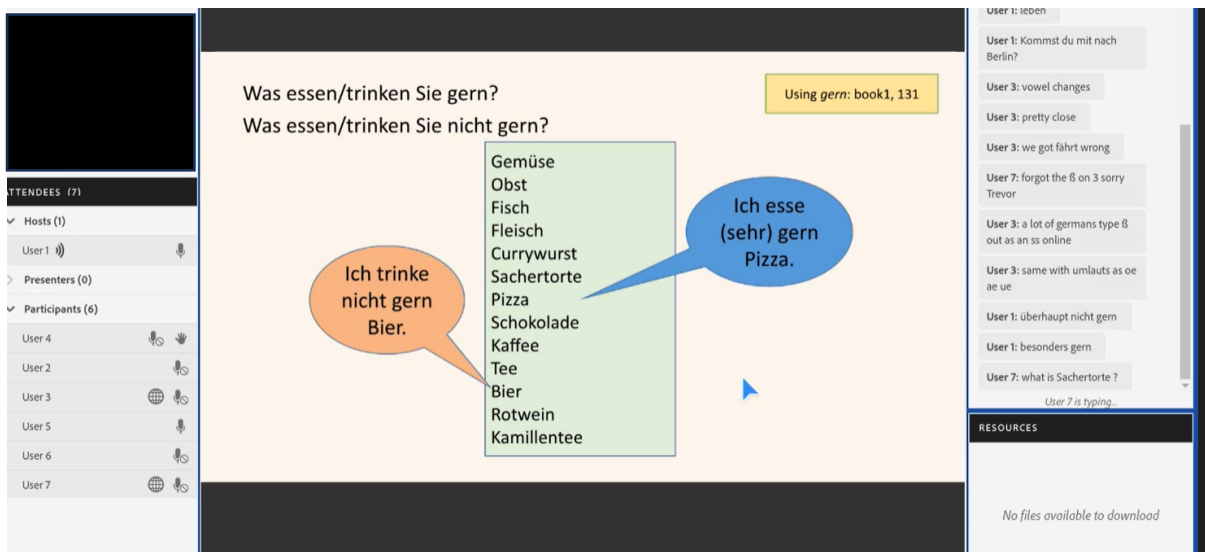


Figure 8

Screenshot 4: Students Express Preferences in German and Apply Their Knowledge



The learning bite in Figure 9 presents and compares the English tenses through the use of a timeline, which includes temporal and aspectual meanings. By studying the timeline, students can appreciate how each tense relates to others and how aspectual meaning is conveyed and relates to temporal meaning (construal categories 1 and 2). In this diagram, the simple present is not represented along the main timeline, but an example is placed beneath the other tenses. This is to denote a non-prototypical function of the present, namely to describe a permanent state, which is not simultaneous to the present moment and therefore cannot be placed on the timeline itself. The timeline conveys the temporal and aspectual meanings of constructions.

Figure 9

Timeline Showing Temporal and Aspectual Forms and Functions in the English Tense System

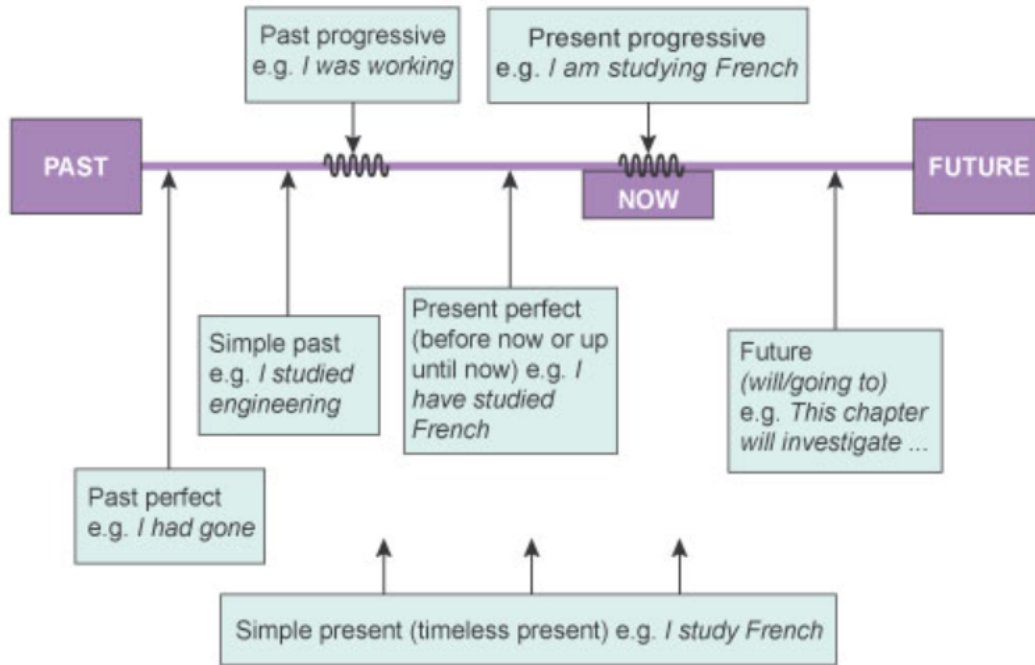


Figure 10 shows an activity the students are then asked to complete in order to identify the tense most commonly used in different text types (construal category 1). Students connect the tense used with the function of each text, thereby learning to differentiate and recognize text types and the grammar that is identified with them (construal categories 2 and 3). Simultaneously, students reinforce their conceptualizations of the meanings of different tenses and how they are applied in academic texts (construal category 4). The comment (Figure 11) reinforces the learning point (construal category 1).

Screencasts

Screencasts are digital recordings of materials on a computer screen, which combine audio-visual elements and sometimes a video of the tutor. They are easy to produce using screen recording software and can incorporate elements of interactivity. A student can be asked to stop the recording, perform an activity, or reflect on the answers to questions, prior to returning to the screencast for feedback and/or answers.

Figures 12–14 are from a screencast about relative clauses in German. Figure 12 presents the characteristic features of the construction and how they relate to one another. The key aspects of the construction are highlighted in colour to promote noticing (construal category 1). In addition, the tutor also emphasizes that the relative pronoun cannot be omitted in German (unlike in English), cognizant of the fact that the students accessing this screencast are living and studying in an English-speaking country (construal category 2).

Figure 13 explains the different component parts of the construction and emphasizes the change in case of the relative pronoun dependent on its function in the relative clause (construal categories 1, 2, and 4). Again, colour is used to facilitate noticing, as are the arrows that are used to denote the

Figure 10

Activity

**Different text types and verb tenses**

Read Extracts A–C and answer the following questions for each of them.

1. **What** is the topic?
2. **What** type of text is it?
3. **Which** verb tense is used the most?

For each extract, choose from the items in the list below to answer the three questions. Copy or type your answers into the boxes following the extracts.

Ecosystems	Description of an <u>object</u>	Past
Light energy	Methods section of a research report	Present
Computing	Introduction to module material	Future

Figure 11

Feedback Comment

**Comment**

The tenses you use depend largely on the text type you are writing. If you are writing an introduction (Extract A), some of the verbs will use the future tense because you are writing about something that will happen in the future. If you are writing a research report (Extract B), many of the verbs will be in the simple past tense. If you are writing a description (Extract C), many verbs will be in the simple present tense – a description focuses on the permanent qualities or routine actions of the thing described and does not refer to time.

Figure 12

Characteristics of Relative Clauses

## Relative Clause

Ich kenne den Mann, der an der Bushaltestelle steht.

- relate to something in the previous clause (**Mann**)
- introduce a subordinate clause (**word order = verb at the end**)
- we cannot omit the **relative pronoun** in German
- relative pronouns are always preceded by a **comma** (brief pause in spoken language) – you can't place them too far from the word they relate to
- relative clauses can be embedded in the sentence or often, they tend to be towards the end (see example above)

Figure 13

Focus on Different Parts of the Relative Clause

## Relative Clauses

Ich werde das **T-Shirt**, **das ich gestern gekauft habe**, heute Abend anziehen.

↓

**Relative Pronoun**

**Relation to T-Shirt: Neuter, Singular / direct Object**

The case of the relative pronoun is determined by its function in the relative clause.

- Der **Mann**, **dem ich immer helfe**, ist schon alt.

↓

**Relation to Mann: Masculine, Singular / Dative**

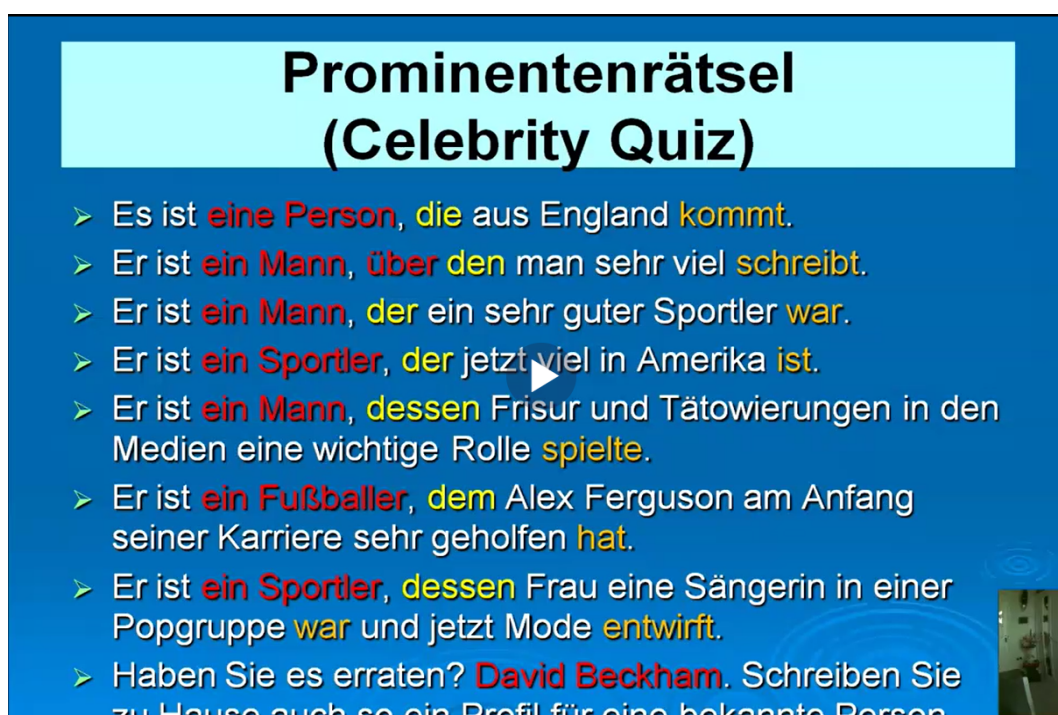
**Dative (Dative in relative clause => Ich helfe dem Mann.)**

different grammatical features of the relative clause (construal category 1). In addition, there is an explanation of the grammatical form of the relative pronoun (construal category 1).

Finally, Figure 14 invites the students to participate in a quiz that uses relative clauses. The quiz involves guessing the identity of a celebrity, described in several sentences. Each sentence uses colour to denote the various components of the relative clause construction (construal category 1). While guessing the famous person, it is anticipated that the students will relate the use of the relative clauses with the real-world example, thereby consolidating the features of the construction, making those features more cognitively salient and available for reapplication (construal categories 1 and 4).

Figure 14

#### Quiz Using Relative Clauses



**Prominentenrätsel  
(Celebrity Quiz)**

- Es ist **eine Person**, **die** aus England **kommt**.
- Er ist **ein Mann**, **über den** man sehr viel **schreibt**.
- Er ist **ein Mann**, **der** ein sehr guter Sportler **war**.
- Er ist **ein Sportler**, **der** jetzt **viel** in Amerika **ist**.
- Er ist **ein Mann**, **dessen** Frisur und Tätowierungen in den Medien eine wichtige Rolle **spielte**.
- Er ist **ein Fußballer**, **dem** Alex Ferguson am Anfang seiner Karriere sehr geholfen **hat**.
- Er ist **ein Sportler**, **dessen** Frau eine Sängerin in einer Popgruppe **war** und jetzt Mode **entwirft**.
- Haben Sie es erraten? **David Beckham**. Schreiben Sie zu Hause auch so ein Profil für eine bekannte Person.

#### Discussion

In the first section of this article, we discussed early cognitive theories of SLA, which hypothesized that the lack of an interface between explicit and implicit knowledge meant that explicit grammar teaching would have little to no impact on SLA. We have argued that the interface hypothesis misrepresents the way that languages are processed, stored, and learned. There can be no dichotomy between explicit and implicit knowledge but rather different parts of an emergent grammatical system at different stages of development (Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Our conceptualization of SLA as a socio-cognitive process is based on two premises: language is learned through socialization into a discourse community where the prevailing grammatical system is internalized through iterative use (Croft, 2001); and in additional language learning, learners make use of existing construal patterns to understand the linguistic system of the additional language (Luo, 2021). This process is triggered through exposure to the target language in context. We agree with Larsen-Freeman (2019) that SLA is both a top-down and a bottom-up process, given that “language emerges

upwards” through interaction but also that patterns downwardly “entrain emergent patterns to ensure intelligibility” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). This system constantly evolves and develops through the interplay between the cognitive processes involved in learning and the sociocultural environment of the speaker.

### *Implications for Grammar Teaching*

With regard to grammar teaching, we have also argued that explicit pedagogical approaches are necessary, independent of the context, but perhaps more specifically in online language teaching and learning environments. This does not mean that inductive methods might not be used alongside deductive presentations and activities as part of an overall explicit methodological approach. What is important, however, is that explicit grammar teaching, which targets construal and related linguistic constructions, is a fundamental and integral part of effective materials and course design and, equally, a fundamental part of a socio-cognitive approach in which grammatical forms are practised and emerge in and from meaningful interaction. In the following sections, we make some recommendations for materials and course design in the teaching of grammar, focussing on cognition.

### Materials Design

In our example materials, we identified aspects of their design that might activate cognitive processes through noticing, comparing, and contrasting new and stored knowledge, recognition of perspective-taking, and the application of acquired knowledge. Of all these processes, however, noticing is most important, so the explicit presentation of grammatical forms to trigger noticing by making them more salient to the learner is a vital aspect of the development of the emergent grammatical system. Within the materials themselves, the use of metalanguage and various highlighting techniques (using colour, bold font, underlining) were some of the pedagogical strategies used to promote salience.

In addition, textbooks traditionally present grammatical forms incrementally (Larsen-Freeman, 2013). Where the tense system is concerned, for example, this tends to be based on the perceived difficulty for the learner to acquire particular forms. Resources that compare multiple constructions in terms of their semantic meanings may be more helpful, given that they facilitate the students’ understanding of how each construction operates within the target language grammatical system. In Figure 9, a timeline is used to present comparisons and contrasts between tense and aspect. For lower-level students this might be achieved through presenting smaller parts of the system, perhaps with a focus on prototypical and non-prototypical meanings.

For the tense system, Figure 9 shows an intra-linguistic comparison of forms and their meanings and does this diagrammatically. Diagrams and visual images may also be used to demonstrate interlinguistic comparison (e.g., Figure 3). Diagrams and visuals may facilitate cognitive processing and conceptual representation because they can show relationships between grammatical items, their semantic meanings, and the sociocultural context.

### Course Design

We identified four different but complementary, mutually reinforcing approaches to grammar teaching adopted at the Open University. In addition to thematically organized course content on the VLE where grammar teaching is integrated, students can step outside the main course content to learn grammar through course-related learning bites and screencasts. They can also benefit from discrete grammar tutorials, which aim to prepare them to participate in integrated skills tutorials where course content and assessment are taught.

Such an approach to course design both separates out and integrates grammar teaching. The discrete resources and the grammar tutorials explicitly complement and reinforce the thematically integrated grammatical content of the course, and they do this using various techniques. Students can

opt to review grammar via a screencast or learning bite; they may equally prefer to attend a grammar tutorial. The opportunities afforded by the resources also cater to individual preferences, learning styles, and perceptions.

### *Recommendations for Future Studies*

In this article, we have focussed on the four construal operations as unitary processes, but we are aware that concepts such as noticing, for example, are complex. Learners may notice in different ways, depending upon individual social and cognitive differences. In addition, certain aspects of grammatical constructions and teacher pedagogic behaviours may facilitate cognitive processing to greater or lesser extents and in different ways. For example, with respect to corrective feedback, Chin et al. (2021) found that in a study of 105 Malaysian second language English learners, the use of recasts promoted higher levels of noticing than other corrective strategies. In addition, Fayram (2017) found that a combination of both explicit pedagogical and social online teacher behaviours was appreciated by language learners for their capacity to increase the salience of online language input. We therefore recognize that there is significant scope for research into the effectiveness of different ways in which cognitive processes may be activated across all contexts (online, hybrid, and face-to-face) in the production of self-access resources and teaching materials and also in classroom teaching methodology.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have argued for an explicit approach to grammar teaching. We contend that a cognitive approach to the presentation and practice of grammatical constructions is an essential part of an overall socio-cognitive blend. This will involve a combination of both deductive and inductive activities and exercises, but the overall pedagogical framework will aim to make the links between forms and their meanings explicit.

In the examples we have selected, we have drawn on cognitive linguistics to show how grammar teaching materials may trigger the cognitive processes involved in construal and the acquisition of grammatical constructions. Furthermore, we have also made some suggestions for materials and course design. While some of the techniques shown in relation to materials design are not new, they could be integrated in more systematic ways, drawing on a CL theoretical underpinning. This necessarily has implications for teacher development, as language teachers will surely benefit from an awareness of the cognitive processes underlying grammar learning.

With respect to course design, we have elaborated on four different techniques to present, practise, and review grammar. Such an iterative approach enables students “to revisit the same territory again and again” (Larsen-Freeman, 2019) as they build up their target language grammatical system. This way of teaching grammar sees language learning as a complex adaptive system in which the process is constantly refined, though never complete (Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Finally, technology will continue to offer new affordances for the ways in which grammar is taught and learned. Providers therefore need to be aware of how these developments may be harnessed to facilitate not only the sociocultural aspects of language learning but also the cognitive ones. This implies an ongoing need for teacher development in this area.

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## The Authors

Sam Austen is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics and English language at the Open University. She has taught languages and trained language teachers both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Her research work focuses on the application of linguistic theory to language teaching and learning and in particular the role that the first language can play in the acquisition of additional languages.

Jo Fayram is an honorary research associate in applied linguistics and English language at the Open University and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA). She has taught and managed EAL in the United Kingdom and overseas. Her research interests include English for academic purposes, cognitive linguistics, and the role of social presence in online language learning

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