

USING COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS INSIGHTS TO TEACH BE GOING TO

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is a usage-based approach to language that understands language as a reflection of human cognitive processes. Due to its focus on meaning conveyed by a given grammatical structure, it is becoming more popular in the field of instructed second language acquisition. This paper presents pedagogical techniques to teach the English future tense form be going to (BGT) that we developed based on findings of CL research into the semantics of the form. BGT has been described as prior intention and prediction based on current situations. A cognitive analysis conducted by Tyler and Jan (2016) reveals that BGT is highly related to human embodied experience and walk cycle. That is, BGT is constructed from the human physical activity of walking towards a goal. From this analysis, in addition to prior intention, imminence and inevitability emerge as other meanings of BGT. However, these meanings are very abstracts, and therefore pose problem to English learners. Corpus research indicates that BGT appears quite later in the development of learner language (Bardovi-Harlig, 2004). To help learners master these meanings, a teaching method grounded in embodied cognition could be beneficial for learners. The meanings of BGT can be introduced and rehearsed in learners' cognition through embodied learning activities, such as Total Physical Response (TPR) and visualization strategies. In this paper, we first discuss why BGT is a difficult form to acquire from a cognitive perspective. Then, we will present an overview of a cognitive linguistic analysis of BGT that reveals how the meanings of BGT are derived from the human's physical experience. After that, we will present our attempts to translate the analysis into a CL-inspired, teacher-led presentation that makes use of visualization strategies and classroom activities that employs TPR and other embodied learning activities. Finally, we will give research directions to explore the efficacy of this approach along with the proposed techniques.

Keywords: *Cognitive Linguistics, embodied learning, Total Physical Response, Indonesian EFL learners*

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia learn English mostly in schools, for approximately 2 hours (with 45 minutes per lesson) per week and the additional of approximately 2 hours if they take English courses. This time allocation is the maximum duration of learning English the learners can have weekly. In some occasions, the time given to study is deducted by other activities or events, making it even shorter and insufficient for input exposure towards the target language. Besides, the input given by the teacher is mostly in the form of decontextualized sentences, rote memorization of rules and pattern drilling. The final output is to produce new sentences using the pattern that has been introduced. This pattern drilling dominates the process of learning (Jean & Simard, 2011), and, as a result, learners are not used to use grammar meaningfully.

To assist learners to learn and produce the target grammatical structures meaningfully, a usage-based approach is necessary. Cognitive Linguistics (hereafter CL) is a usage-based approach to studying language. According to CL, language reflects our general cognitive such as perception which is sufficient to account for grammar. Learning grammatical meanings is presumably more appealing and enjoyable than rote memorizing rules and patterns (Langacker, 2008). Therefore, CL insights have the potential to be applied in second language (L2) instruction.

Recently, there have been a good number of CL analyses of English grammatical structures, and these analyses have inspired pedagogical materials for classroom instruction. However, there are other grammatical forms that have not been grounded in CL although the CL analyses are available such as the simple future tense forms *will* and *be going to* (henceforth *BGT*). Recent CL analyses of these forms have been presented by Tyler and Jan (2016), and might be potentially useful for teaching the forms. Nevertheless, learning materials based on the insights from CL to teach these forms are yet to be designed. This paper attempts to develop CL-informed instructional materials to teach the English simple future tense *will* and *BGT*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to CL, the meanings of BGT include prior intention, imminence, assumption, and inevitability (Tyler & Jan, 2016; Brisard, 2001). In this study, the meanings that will be taught are the ones in contrast

with the meanings of *will*: prior intention vs. intention, imminence vs. certainty, and inevitability vs. conditional. In what follows, we will present a brief overview of the meanings. Then, we will propose some classroom teaching ideas that are in line with CL theory.

A brief overview of CL analysis of *will* and *BGT*

Prior intention vs. intention

The *prior intention* meaning of BGT can be clearly contrasted with the volitional use of *will* in which the actor's intention does not involve previous planning (Brisard, 2001).

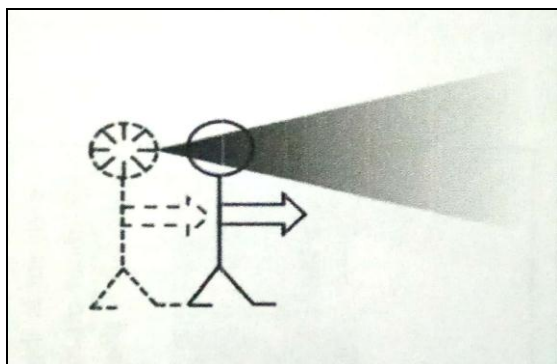


Figure 1. The diagram of *prior intention*

Example:

- a. I am going to visit him.
- b. I will visit him.

In 1(a), it can be clearly seen that the intention to visit John was already present or planned by the speaker before the actual request is made, while in 1(b), the intention appeared as a result of the request (Brisard, 2001; Tyler & Jan; 2016).

Imminence vs. certainty

This meaning indicates that the speaker confidently made the judgment based on the presence of strong evidence (Brisard, 2001; Tyler & Jan; 2016).

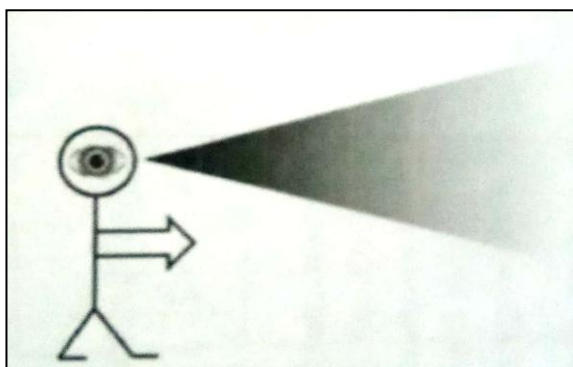


Figure 2. The diagram of *imminence*

Example:

- a. I am going to be sick.
- b. I will be sick.

In 2(a), the possibility of the speaker to get sick is understood to be more imminent and more likely to happen because the speaker experienced such signs of the sickness, and therefore, the speaker does not have control over the imminent event. In contrast, in 2(b), the speaker will get sick only if some requirements of such condition are fulfilled. (Brisard, 2001; Tyler & Jan, 2016)

Inevitability vs. conditional

The meaning of “inevitability” is contrasted with ‘contingency’ or unfulfilled condition found in the uses of *will* (Tyler & Jan, 2016).

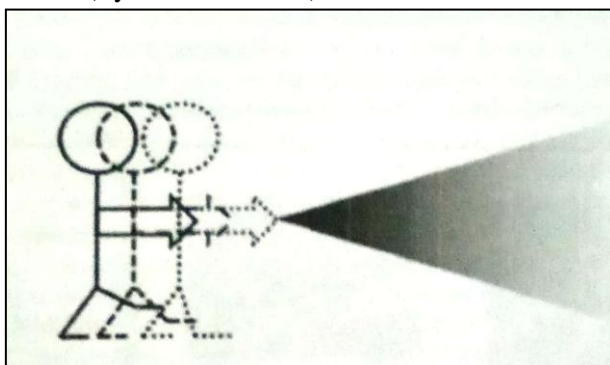


Figure 3. The diagram of *inevitability*

Example:

- a. Don't get near that parcel! It is going to explode!
- b. Don't get near that parcel! It will explode!

In 3(a), whether the addressee gets near the parcel or not, the explosion still happens. In other words, the addressee has no voluntary control over the situation. Whereas in 3(b), the explosion is triggered when the addressee gets near the parcel, meaning that he/she has voluntary control over the situation (Tyler & Jan, 2016)

Teaching ideas

In the context of teaching and learning process in classroom, CL can be implemented through what is called as ‘embodied learning’. Embodied learning involves “the use of gesture, movement and the body as an important semiotic resource (actual embodied learning activities) and/or visual and diagrammatic representations (virtual embodied learning activities)” (Giovanelli, 2015: 89). The activities are designed for the purpose of encouraging students to explore the concepts of grammar and meaning aspects rather than just learn a set of technical and abstruse terms (Giovanelli, 2015). Some embodied learning activities that can be used to teach BGT are TPR and visualization strategies.

Total Physical Response

Developed by James J. Asher, the TPR approach emphasizes that understanding of learning should be developed through the movement of the student's body (Asher, 1977). Learning using TPR starts with an imagistic use of memory and makes a physical and linear instantiation of the target grammar, building a bridge between movement, imagination and recollection that results in the acquisition of the target form (Holme, 2009). This approach is in line with the idea of applied CL since the central premise of implementing CL in classroom is experience rooted in physical movement and physical imagery as the conceptual basis of language (including aspects of lexis, semantics, and grammar) (Giovanelli, 2015).

In the classroom-based research we proposed, TPR is intergrated in a warming-up game activity. For preparation, the teacher prepares some statements like “I prefer chocolate to cheese”, “Dogs are cuter than cats”, etc. Then, two pieces of paper with “AGREE” or “DISAGREE” sign are taped to the classroom wall separately. When the warming-up game starts, the students gather in the middle of the classroom then wait for the teacher's instructions. The teacher reads the statements he/she has prepared one by one. The students have to decide whether they are “AGREE” or “DISAGREE” with the statement by moving towards the signs on the wall. For example: the teacher reads: “I prefer chocolate to cheese”. Students who agree with the statement have to move to the “AGREE” sign, where students who disagree have to move to the “DISAGREE” sign. This is repeated several times. Next, the teacher reads another statement then the students move to the signs. However, when the students are walking, the teacher stops them and asks “Where are you going?” This is the concept of BGT that the teacher needs to explain in the lesson. In contrast, for the next statement, the teacher reads a statement and asks directly to the students (so the students do not have to walk to the signs) what is their answer. This is the concept of *will* as the contrast of BGT concept.

Visualization strategies

Visuals can be used as a pedagogical tool since they represent a mode of thinking that is used widely in daily lives. Even an abstract subject can be thought of with the help of visuals. That is, through reference to the real physical world that are articulated through drawing (Hope, 2008). Furthermore, using visualization strategies, the physical nature of the grammar can be shown as an action chain, with an arrow denoting the source and direction of energy (Giovanelli, 2015). this typical structure is called as a 'billiard ball model', in which in the game of billiards one entity acts to affect another through some kind of energy release, transmission and subsequent change (Langacker, 2008).

Visuals used in the teaching of BGT are in forms of diagrams and animation. In explaining the concept of the target form, the teacher may use the diagrams proposed by Tyler and Jan (2016) as viewed in the literature review. In addition to that, making animation by using any softwares can also be useful.

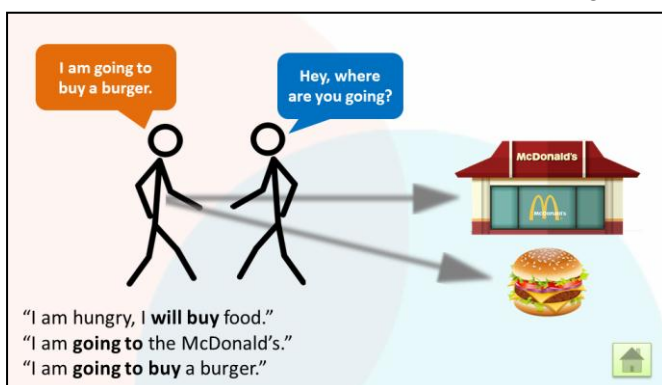


Figure 4. The picture/animation of *prior intention* vs. *will*

PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To probe into the efficacy of CL-grounded instruction in teaching BGT, classroom-based research is needed. Here we outline key research aspects for those who wish to conduct research on this topic.

Participants

It is desirable to conduct this study with secondary school learners in a big city, especially those who sit in the seventh and eighth grades. Arguably, these learners are quite familiar with *will* but they are still not yet used to BGT. In terms of age, these learners have developed abstract and logical thinking (Piaget & Inhelder, 2013). This kind of thinking is needed to help them understand the more abstract uses of BGT. Moreover, most textbooks include BGT, so the pedagogical treatment can still be in accordance to the syllabus, and the classroom teacher would not mind having their students as research subjects.

Tests

Learning should be measured in multiple ways. By doing this we will elicit more data for our research. Three types of assessment that can be used to measure participants' learning are comprehension test, controlled production test, and free production test. The comprehension test can come in the form of sentence interpretation task (Gass & Mackey, 2016; MacWhinney, 1987). This task is often used in research on the Competition Model and focuses on how information is processed by learners. In this task, the learner is provided with some sentences with BGT and some other with *will*. For each sentence, two possible interpretations are given. Learners have to choose which interpretation goes with the sentence based on the clue in the sentence. For example, one sentence reads "Vera is going to paint her bedroom tomorrow."

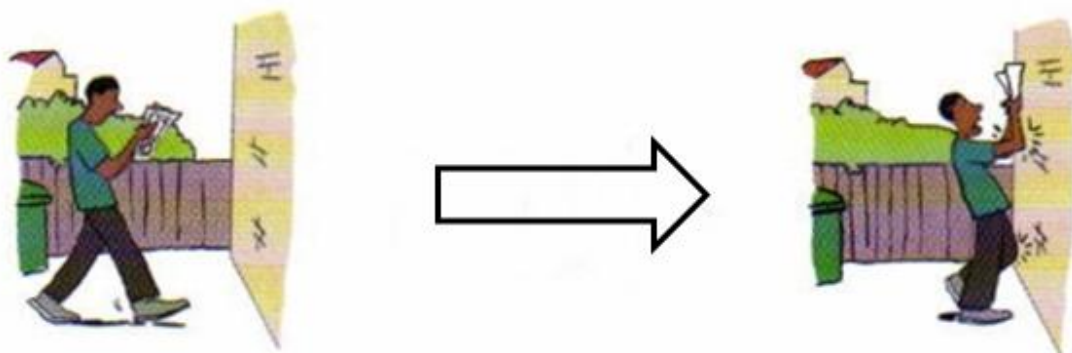
Two possible interpretations are (a) the plan to paint the bedroom was made before the statement is said and (b) the plan to paint the bedroom was made when the statement is said. The learner needs to rely on clue, which is the modal/semi-modal appearing before the verb.

The controlled production task is frequently used in second language research since in this task learners need only to focus on the target structure they have to use. However, it is important to provide sufficient context so that the answer will not be ambiguous. For example, the learner reads:

A: Are you busy on Saturday night? I've got front-row seats for the baseball game.

B: I'm not sure. I _____ (attend) my friend's wedding, but I _____ (let) you know if I can go with you.

The free-production task can come in a picture description task (Gass & Mackey, 2012). In the picture description task, the learner is shown a picture of an event and a prompt. The learner needs to make a sentence based on the picture and prompt using the target form. For example, It is important to pilot test these testing materials first in order to ensure each question item has a fixed answer. Administering a delayed post-test would reveal the long term effect of this approach. For example, the learner is provided with this picture:



Prompt: John does not see the wall in front of him, so _____

CONCLUSION

CL, in the form of embodied learning, can be implemented in classroom to help fostering the acquisition of a target grammar. The embodied learning itself may use TPR approach and visualization strategies to give the students the clear understandable meanings of the target form. It is because meaning is acquired through the interaction of physical bodies in the real world, in which in embodied learning, learners get the first hand experience of learning the target grammar by making gestures, seeing virtual explanations, etc. Students will also enjoy the fun learning environment as the result of involving physical activities and visual aids in the process of learning the target form.

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