

Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Instructed L2 Learning: An Experimental Investigation

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Recent years have witnessed growing interest in cognitive linguistics (CL) and its potential insights for L2 learning. However, few experimental investigations have applied a CL perspective to L2 learning. English prepositions represent a promising target for the application of CL to instructed L2 learning since CL represents the many meanings associated with a single preposition as being systematically related in principled ways. A CL approach would appear to provide a useful, organized rubric for learning the complex, nuanced set of meanings associated with prepositions such as *to* and *for*, as well as an explanation for how the prepositions interact with certain verbs. In contrast, traditional approaches to English prepositions represent their many meanings as largely arbitrary. Typical ESL texts present these multiple meanings in lists. The assumption seems to be that the students must simply memorize them. This paper reports the results of an effects-of-instruction study aimed at examining the efficacy of applying a CL approach to instructed L2 learning of the semantics of three English prepositions, *to*, *for* and *at*. The participants were 63 advanced adult English learners. The participants were randomly assigned to either a CL instruction group or a traditional instruction group. Pretest scores showed there was no measurable difference between the groups. Both group received two 60 minute interventions consisting of teacher fronted instruction followed by task-based activities. The teacher-fronted materials provided numerous sentences illustrating meanings of the prepositions accompanied by pictures, video clips and cartoons. The only difference in treatment was that the CL instruction presented the many meanings of the prepositions in terms of systematic meaning networks motivated by principles such as metaphoric extension. Twenty-four hours after the second intervention, post-tests were administered. Results of an ANCOVA showed the CL group made significantly greater gains in their use of the targeted prepositions ($p=.001$).