Imaginative Grammar

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IMAGINATIVE GRAMMAR[1]

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1. Introduction: 'Mission Impossible'?

In 1998, *Hachette Education* – France's leading publishing house – asked me to help design a new method for teaching English in French junior high schools (grades 6-9). Grammar was to be 'simple', 'accessible to all' and 'exempt from linguistic jargon', whilst achieving a level of description 'conducive to a deeper reflection on language.'

Should I attempt the impossible? Or should I wisely turn the offer down?

I had read M. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), R. Arnheim's *Visual Thinking* (1969), M. Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* (1987) and *Moral Imagination* (1993), G. Lakoff's *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987), R. Langacker's *Concept, Image and Symbol* (1991). I had come to realize that 'all knowledge takes place within the horizons opened up by perception' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 207) and held 'the dichotomy between perceiving and thinking' to be arbitrary (Arnheim 1969: 154). The existence of pure, body-free concepts was a pervasive and harmful 'objectivist' illusion:

> [H]uman concepts are not just reflections of an external reality, but are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, especially by our sensorimotor system. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 22)

This had a liberating effect on my mind. I was free to believe in 'the imaginative character of human reason' (Johnson 1993: 1) and tap the boundless resources of 'imaginative cognition' (33) without posing as a prophet or a romantic poet. I could use 'the imaginative materials of cognition' (3) to conceptualize grammar. Percept and concept, imagination and reason, narrative and formal syntactic analysis could be brought together to provide a new, holistic understanding of the way language works.

Yes, English syntax could be understood imaginatively, through metaphor, image schemata and narrative. Yes, abstract – and often elusive – grammatical meaning could be grasped through the senses, using perception and movement. As the product of human reason, grammar had a bodily basis. As the central organizing principle in verbal communication, it had an experiential and interactional grounding. I would allow young learners to 'grasp', 'feel' or 'see' the syntax of English and refer to sociocultural frames in the presentation of 'highly technical' aspects of English grammar (e.g. auxiliaries as 'helpers'; 'verbal affixes' as 'garments' donned by the base, etc.). Using the *Hachette Education* project as a springboard, I would promote a different vision of language teaching in which the word 'grammar' would often rhyme with 'picture', 'gesture' and 'adventure'. I would create 'PictoGrams', 'KineGrams' and 'NarraGrams'. And since the official guidelines issued by the French Ministry of Education required that learners 'reflect' upon the deeper organization of linguistic structure, I would show how grammar can be used to access human knowledge systems: how we construe time, how we locate things in space, how we conceptualize events and understand our lives, how we categorize, how we handle causal links – in short how we organize our experience of the world into coherent mental configurations.

So I signed the *Hachette Education* contract and became *Monsieur Grammaire Cognitive*.

2. Deconstructing grammatical discourse

My first task was to establish that all grammatical discourse is subjective, ideological and fundamentally metaphoric in nature. This amounted to deflating the myth of 'objective grammar'.

To a cognitive linguist, the metaphoric and image schematic nature of most grammatical concepts is self-evident. To other people, it is not. So I found myself explaining how our rationalizations of linguistic structure known as 'theories of grammar' were governed by conceptual metaphors or metonymies, organized into 'scripts' or 'narratives', and dominated by the 'cognitive unconscious' (as defined in Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 11-12).

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[1] Published in *Cognitive Linguistics Today*. Lodz Studies in Language. Vol. 6. Edited by Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Kamila Turewicz. Frankfurt / M : Peter Lang, 623-642, 2002.

My contention was – and still is – that the conceptual structures we use to reason about language are by no means 'special'. It is of vital importance to dispel the widespread belief that the 'technical terms' or 'specialized vocabulary' of grammar – e.g. 'auxiliary', 'operator', 'determiner', 'shifter', 'modal' – belong to highly sophisticated systems of conceptualization and reasoning. Nothing about grammar is 'out of the ordinary'. If anything, the opposite seems to be true. Linguistic theory, which may indeed sound abstract and utterly removed from our folk understanding of language, uses the simplest, most basic conceptual material and imaginative resources available to the human mind.

Here is a list of basic concepts and standard labels commonly used to describe grammatical phenomena. As their etymology suggests, their pre-conceptual roots are spatial and perceptual:

aspect : from Latin *specere* 'to look'.
determination: from Lat. *terminare* 'to limit'.
event : from Lat. *evenire* 'to come out / forth', from *venire* 'to come' + *e[x]-* 'out'.
fact : from *factus* 'made', from *facere* 'to make'
occur, occurrence : from Latin *occurrere* 'to run up to', from *ob-* 'towards' and *currere* 'to run'.
reality : from *res* 'thing'

Yet, what kind of cognitive 'evidence' does etymology provide? Shouldn't the perceptions (e.g. look), activities (e.g. make) and movements (e.g. run) be considered as 'dead metaphors'? Assuming this to be the case, can dead metaphors be brought to life again? Can a cognitively dormant mapping be activated again? If so, would the restoration of the original construal help modern users of the terms? My guess was that it would.

Much groundwork was accordingly devoted to a 'cognitive archeology' of mainstream grammatical concepts and a resurrection of their defunct socio-physical properties. Once this was done, I had to find new ways of packaging the ancient and forgotten meanings of grammatical terms. This, I hoped, would make them more accessible to the pupils sitting in my imaginary classroom.

2.1. 'X-rays'.

As a firm believer in the centrality of vision, I decided to build on the KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor and proposed to 'X ray' standard grammatical terminology. I thought it might be interesting to 'see through' ordinary terms such as 'past' or more technical ones like 'auxiliary' or 'superlative'. Not only would they acquire greater 'clarity' or 'transparency', but also some of the primitive notions hidden in the darkest recesses of our 'cognitive unconscious' might be 'brought to light' and provide a secure basis for narrative and imaginative rationalizations of grammatical meaning. Speaking through the voice of *Magic Lingo – le génie de la langue* ('the language genie' cf. 2.2.) – I 'made a deal' with sixth graders:

> **'Friends or enemies'** (grade 6) [English translation of the original French text]
> Last time we talked about *grammar*. Do you remember?
> *Grammar makes it possible for words to live and work together in sentences*.
> The only trouble is, you have to use *special terms* like 'pronoun', 'determiner' or 'adverb' to *talk about grammar*. They're hard to understand. They're dry and 'technical'. Wouldn't it be better if we got rid of them?
>
> The problem is we can't! *We use technical terms all the time! We need them everywhere!*
> I'm sure you know the difference between 'leaded' and 'unleaded' petrol [gas].
> Have you ever thought of what would happen if you didn't? You'd waste a lot of effort describing the kind of fuel your car runs on: 'Excuse me sir, I'd like some of that smelly liquid substance that goes into the tank and supplies energy for the engine'.
> Long, inaccurate and awkward! You'd sound silly, wouldn't you?
>
> The same goes for grammar. We need special words to describe language. Once we know them, they save a lot of time. They're handy …and accurate! Just like 'leaded' or 'unleaded'.
> So let's make a deal. I'll tick as many 'technical terms' off my list as I can. The ones I keep I will 'X ray' in front of you. That way, you can *see what's inside them*.
> Once you *see*, you'll understand.
> I'm only asking you to look and remember. Nothing more.
>
> It's a deal!

As promised, the list of grammatical terms was reduced to a minimum. Every item that was kept had been previously 'X-rayed' in my own laboratory – an operation not so simple as *Magic Lingo* made it sound on tape.

– **past**: the X-ray revealed 'steps' (Latin *passus*). But this raised more problems than it solved: who is walking? On what path? What exactly is the cognitive mechanism involved? Is backward motion along an imaginary trail really central to our understanding of the past?
  Although the *passus* metaphor prompted the 'Ocean beach' and 'Time machine' stories (in which 'stepping', 'treading' and 'walking' are highlighted) I could not bring myself to reduce the cognitive complexity of the past to 'a journey back in time'. Other conceptual metaphors were equally relevant, in particular the role of memory: REMEMBERING AS LOOKING BACK; MEMORIES AS MARKS OR SCARS, etc. All this made me aware of the main drawback of my 'X-ray machine': it would focus the learner's attention on what was 'visible' inside a particular descriptive label at the expense of the other 'invisible' notions.

– **superlative**: the X-ray revealed a verticality metaphor (Latin *superus* 'placed above'). Was the superlative in some way about 'rising to the top'? If so, how was I to express this in story form?

> **'Go for the best!'** (grade 7) [full transcript]
> Are you comfortably seated? Have you braced yourself for the news?
> *Magic Lingo is leaving*.
> My contract has expired. A few more lessons and I'm gone. Soon, I will be an ordinary genie again.
> Not that this pleases me!
> I know what's awaiting me. Lamps rubbed and wishes made. More of the same dreams!
> *Make me rich! Make me beautiful! Make me powerful!*
> Well, that's easy! I only need to say /-st/ and you instantly *rise to the top*!
> *You are now the richest and the most beautiful person in the world!*
>
> I know what you're thinking. 'That sound /-st/ isn't very nice, is it?' Sure, but that's what it takes to become a star shining above the rest of us!
> Just wait till *I* turn *you* into *the youngest and most famous actor in Hollywood*! You'll love that ugly /-st/! You'll be asking for more superlatives, you the superstar!
> But, be warned! You'll be lonely at the top!
>
> So, what am I going to do next? I rather liked living in the company of words…
> I know what I want to be! A pop artist. *The best music, the finest lyrics*.
> Give me one /-st/…and I'll rise to the top of the charts!

MORE IS UP	MOST IS HIGHEST
BETTER IS UP	BEST IS ABOVE (lat. *super*)

The 'Top of the Pops' story was very well received. But its popularity created potential hazards for enthusiastic learners who were led to think that all superlative constructions had positive meanings – when they don't (cf. 2.1.2.).

2.2. 'Untold stories' told.

Was I the only storyteller in the story-free world of grammar?

I chose to believe that I was not. Stories had been told for decades in an underhand way. Auxiliaries were a typical case. All the dramatic ingredients were there: a bunch of 'helping verbs' (Lat. *auxilium* 'help') assisting ordinary lexical verbs. Why wasn't the story acknowledged as such? It had a clear epic outline. With a little invention, it could be improved to capture the imagination of young learners. The small set of auxiliary verbs could be featured as a squad and the assistance they so generously provided turned into a thrilling rescue operation.

But there was a danger in over-dramatizing a syntactic process. Too captivating an adventure story would make the traditional conception of auxiliary systems too appealing to learners. It would perpetuate a conception of auxiliary verbs that most of us regard as outdated.

More generally, I feared that *explaining* what standard descriptive labels meant would be interpreted as a *justification* of their conventional use by traditional grammarians. Rewriting 'the untold stories' could thus backfire on me. I would be seen as upholding conceptions that were no longer held among scholars. Critics would seize on this to prove that, under the guise of modernity, cognitive linguistics was quite retrograde.

2.3 'Folk understanding'.

'Folk theories' are 'basic explanatory models' shared by members of a given culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 352). We may safely assume that language is a revealer of such 'models'. Whether naïve or sophisticated, 'mythical' or 'scientifically true', folk conceptions of time, space, events, causes, etc. are those we live by. It is therefore essential that a cognitive grammar of English written for French-speaking students be based on the established phraseology and associated conceptual systems found in French.

Consider future time reference. At first sight, English and French have similar ways of construing futurity, as a spatial, temporal, modal or ethical concept. Depending on the context, the future can be viewed as an open space lying ahead of us; as a series of moving events coming towards us; as something to be 'built' (*construire son avenir* 'to build oneself a future'), etc. Yet, what is striking about French is the importance given to visual percepts. *Prévoir* (lit. 'to foresee') is used more often than *predire* ('to predict'), which tends to be restricted to fortune-telling. The French equivalent of 'predictable' is *prévisible* (lit. 'foreseeable') formed on 'visible'.

This observation led me to write a chapter entitled 'Picture the future' in which I applied the logic of seeing to futurity. As I worked, I wondered why visual metaphors weren't used in grammar books to discriminate between the verbal constructions available for future time reference. In French, phrases like *je* ***vois bien*** *ce qui va se passer* ('I know what's going to happen', lit. 'I can see very well…') are common indeed. So I chose to 'picture the future' as a landscape stretching before the eyes of the speaker or conceptualizing subject. I was then in a position to describe:

- 'planned events' (social gatherings, trips) as pre-assembled structures or buildings (Fr. *constructions*) located at some distance from the observer (e.g. 'We're having a party tomorrow').
- 'certainty' as clarity / sharpness and 'uncertainty' as haziness / blurred outlines (e.g. *I will visit you in June. I may visit you in June*.)

Early testing showed that French pupils greeted the new visual presentation of futurity enthusiastically.

Would native English speakers react so positively? 'Predict', 'predictive' and 'predictable' all refer to speech (from Latin *praedicere* 'to mention beforehand'; from *prae-* 'before' and *dicere* 'to say'). 'Foresee', which literally means 'to see [an event] before [it happens]', is explicitly visual but marginally used. 'Expect', from *spectare* 'to look at', is a more common verb. But its Latin origin is not easily perceived by ordinary speakers. As for 'anticipate', it refers to another concept, since it literally means 'to take before' (from *ante-* + *capere* 'to take'). The cognitive resources available through ordinary lexical usage are thus more varied in English. But using vision to conceptualize futurity would probably make as much sense to English-speaking teenagers as it does to French learners. 'Pictures of the future' fill computer screens. More generally, visual concepts are a key component of the multimedia environment they live in.

3. Revitalizing grammatical discourse

As suggested earlier, the 'imaginative resources' of human reason (Johnson 1997: 152) have been denied their rightful place in standard grammatical discourse. I believed it was high time they were reinstated through the systematic use of image schemata, metaphorical idioms, conceptualizing gestures and mappings.

I felt a cognitive grammar of English had to be conceived in a way that reflected its own principles. One thing was to preach that 'conceptual metaphor is one of our central intellectual tools' (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 155), that 'we typically conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 59) and that we constantly engage in 'cognitive connections' (Fauconnier & Sweetser 1996: 7) between different domains of experience (spatial, social, emotional…). Another was to find the right 'projection', 'connection' or 'transfer' from familiar domains of knowledge and experience – e.g. putting clothes on – to the foreign world of English syntax and morphology (e.g. affixing *–ed* to the base to form the preterit).

'Breaking the rules' (grade 6) [full transcript]

In many English schools, pupils have to wear uniforms. There's a special rule that says 'Everybody must be dressed alike'. I can remember *my* school uniform very well– a white shirt, gray shorts, a green jacket and a pair of black shoes.
English verbs have to wear uniforms too. 'Putting them in the past' is like 'putting them to school'. There's a special rule that says 'Every verb must end in *–ed*' – as in *called* or *happened*.
Yet, some verbs choose to dress differently. They break the *rule*. They're *irregular*. For instance, *go* dresses up as *went*, *take* as *took* and *sting* as *stung*. Some even refuse to wear *any* dress at all –as *cut* or *put*. They go about stark naked!

Irregular verbs are a curse. Their form is unpredictable. They make life miserable.
That's what you probably think!
But I don't agree! Irregular verbs are *creative*. They design their own fancy clothes. They never wear those dull uniforms!

Irregular verbs are true artists! Doesn't this make you like them more?

VERBS AS PERSONS / PUPILS
VERBAL AFFIXES AS ARTICLES OF CLOTHING
REGULAR FORMS AS UNIFORMS
IRREGULARITY AS REBELLIOUSNESS
IRREGULARITY AS CREATIVITY

Play on words in the original French version: *règle* ('grammar rule') and *règlement* ('school rule'); *forme* ('form') and *uniforme* ('uniform'); *mettre un vêtement* ('to put one's clothes on') and *mettre au passé* ('to put [use] a verb in the past').
In French, the base form of a verb is often called *la forme nue* (lit. 'the naked [bare] form']. This makes the analogy between 'affixing *–ed* to the base' and 'dressing the base' particularly meaningful to French listeners.

3.1. Old grams, new descriptions.

The applied cognitive grammar of English found in the new *Hachette* textbook series is unsettling. Soon though, the descriptions acquire a homeliness and user friendliness that delight many. This is easily explained by the fact that all are grounded in familiar knowledge systems.

3.1.1. The English verb revisited

Tense, aspect and modality are among the first grammatical concepts that beginners encounter.

Encounters of this kind must be prepared if they are to be happy occasions. My role as a cognitive linguist was to reflect on the way actions are conceptualized before I embarked on a description of the grammatical constructions involved.

Much work on 'event-structure concepts' had already been done by Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 170-234) while Langacker had offered some precious insights into 'the canonical event model' (2000: 24-27). His remarks on object manipulation, physical contact and the transmission of energy (1991: 209-211) were thought-provoking. My own, small contribution to the field was a discussion of 'The *go*, the *get* and the *make* scenarios' (Lapaire 2001).

In this section, I will limit myself to a handful of basic deontic modal meanings. I will show that these can be taught differently, using our common metaphoric understanding of events.

Actions can be conceived as (a) destinations to be reached, (b) objects to be made, (c) containers. Other conceptualizations exist, but were less relevant to my purpose.

(a) DESIRED ACTIONS AS DESIRED LOCATIONS; PERFORMING AS 'GETTING THERE'
Lexical realization: this conception is lexically encoded in a number of set-phrases: 'the course of events' (from Latin *currere* 'to run'), 'off you go', 'go for it', 'let's get going', etc.
Major entailments: the 'path to action' may be 'smooth' or 'rough'; 'straight' or 'winding'; 'blocked' or 'free', etc. It normally leads to a destination –or 'desired location'.
Applicability: as Sweetser has demonstrated (1990: 49-75), the *go*-scenario is particularly suited to conceptualize modality.

– 'can' indicates the existence of an obstacle-free road leading to the desired action-location. Deontic 'can' (e.g. 'You can start') metaphorically 'gives the go-ahead' and is like 'getting on the freeway'. Some phrasal equivalents of 'can' in French make this explicit: *ça passe*, *ça roule*, *vas-y* ('go ahead'), *la voie est libre* ('the road is clear'). Negation is conceptualized as a barrier obstructing what was initially thought to be a free and open path (e.g. 'You can't come to my party tonight'). With perception verbs (e.g. 'I can see / hear you'), 'can' indicates that perception 'travels freely' along the visual the visual or auditory channels.

– prototypical uses of deontic 'must' may be pictured as forced movement to a given action-location (e.g. 'You must come to my party')[2]. Some internal or external force is exerted on the agentive subject, bringing pressure to bear on him / her. The language of force-dynamics is particularly suited to French students since their language makes abundant use of forces and pressure to express

[2] This example shows the superiority of force dynamics over purely semantic accounts of modal meanings. The notion of 'obligation' which is routinely applied to deontic *must* is not adequate here. There's no 'obligation' to come to the party, only 'friendly pressure'.

coercion: *mettre la pression* ('to (put) pressure (on) someone'), *avoir la pression* ('to be under pressure to act'); *forcer à…* ('to force someone to do something'), *être forcé de…* ('to be forced [= under obligation] to…'); *pousser quelqu'un à…* ('to push [= press, urge] someone to do sth'). Adding to Sweetser's description, I translated the negative form of 'must' in terms of 'pulling back' or 'holding back'. Force is applied to draw the subject away from the action. 'You mustn't…' is thus converted into 'draw / bring / carry away from….' KineGrams representing force or pressure applied to the agent (directly on his or her back) are easily imagined. The following NarraGram complemented the description:

> **'Pushed around**.' (grade 7) [full transcript]
> When I was a child, I used to spend my holidays with my grandmother – *Granny Lingo*.
> She was kind to me but quite bossy at times. She liked to control *everything* and kept telling me what to do. *Drink your milk! Eat your bread! Don't pick your nose! Don't talk to me like that!* She really knew how to use those verbs in the imperative!
> As if that wasn't enough, she had other means of pressuring me. If I didn't concentrate on my homework, she would grumble *You must concentrate!* If I watched too much television in the afternoon, she would almost invariably say *You must go out and get some exercise!* and push me out of the house.
> Yes, she *pushed me in the back* all the time! That was her way of *forcing me to do* the things she felt were 'good' for me. Of course, the more she pushed, the more I resisted!
> And if ever I did something wrong, she pulled me back by the collar and yelled *You mustn't do that!*
>
> Granny Lingo was *very* strict. But I loved her so. The day she died, I cried and cried. And then I thought I heard a gentle voice, telling me softly: *You mustn't cry honey. You mustn't cry…*

NECESSITY AS FORCE OR PRESSURE
DECISION TO ACT AS MOVEMENT TOWARDS DESIRED ACTION-LOCATION
PREVENTION OF ACTION AS MOVEMENT AWAY FROM ACTION-LOCATION

(b) ACTIONS AS OBJECTS

Lexical realization: in English 'something' is often used to refer to an event (e.g. 'Something happened'). So is *quelque chose* in French (e.g. *Quelque chose est arrivé*). French speakers are familiar with this kind of reification of action. *Faire* ('to make') substitutes for any activity verb (e.g. *Qu'est-ce que tu fais?* 'What are you doing?'). *Fabriquer* ('to manufacture') is used in the phrase *Qu'est-ce que tu fabriques?* ('What are you up to?').

Major entailments: agentivity and control are metaphorically construed as 'handling' the action-thing (e.g. 'I can't handle this' ; 'I have a crisis on my hands'). Responsibility is often construed as ownership. Stopping is metaphorically construed as dropping the action-thing, as in Fr. *Laisse tomber*! or Engl. 'Drop it!', 'Don't give up', 'Let / leave off it!', etc.

Applicability: developing an awareness of the 'action-thing' metaphor does indeed help acquire a number of 'idiomatic constructions'. It also provides a means of describing grams:

– 'mustn't' in 'You mustn't smoke' means 'hands off (the action)' or 'drop this (activity) instantly'. The socio-physical basis of the metaphor is obvious: for young children, not doing is often a matter of not touching. In practice, 'Don't touch!' means 'it's forbidden' (because its dirty, silly, dangerous, etc.).

(c) REQUIRED ACTIONS AS CONTAINERS

Actions are bounded regions. The subject may be located within the region and, in some cases 'trapped', 'caught inside' with no easy way out.

I developed an awareness of this more peripheral construal when I was asked to teach the difference between the modal 'must' and the periphrastic form 'have to'. Standard accounts mentioned an opposition between 'external obligation' or 'objective necessity' ('have to') and 'self-imposed obligation' or 'obligation emanating from the speaker' ('must').

As shown by Sweetser (1990: 54) 'must' describes forced motion from one state-location to another. The force can be applied from within ('inner compulsion') or from the outside. The logic of forced motion is consistent with the interactional properties of the modal: controlling someone's behavior and overcoming resistance (construed as 'a counter-force').

To me, 'have to' tells a different kind of story – one of confinement and claustrophobia. Absolute necessity is 'inescapable'. This is where the action-container metaphor acquires its usefulness. 'Have to'

is used to hold the subject captive, trapped inside the action-container. 'There's no escape, no way out of this' (Fr. *on n'y échappe pas*) as in 'I have to get up at 6 every morning to catch the school bus'.
The logic of captivity works even better in negative contexts where 'don't have to' can be described as 'being freed from…' or 'being offered a way out' (Fr. *on y échappe*) as in 'You don't have to do the washing up'.
'Have to' can also be construed as 'fetters'. The grammatical subject cannot escape as a result of being 'chained to the action'. In French *être tenu d'agir* ('under obligation to act', lit. 'held to act'). In English 'bound by necessity', 'bound by law'.
The logic of binding and the logic of captivity meet in the 'Galley slaves' story which I wrote for second graders. Galley slaves had to row. They were physically chained to the oars. They were kept inside the galley which was their prison, etc.

Spring into English (©Hachette Education) is the first course book to explain modal usage in this way. Other English methods published in France stick to the usual lists of 'modal meanings'. Some of these meanings, like 'obligation' or 'permission', are relatively clear to French learners. But 'capacity' and 'necessity' are not. The language of forces, barriers, jails, fetters and freeways could provide a welcome alternative.

3.1.2. The 'spatialization' and 'embodiment' of grammatical meaning

Grammatical units are 'symbolic' and 'have conceptual import' (Langacker 1991: 211). Grammatical meaning is usually abstract and its characterization elusive.

Mark Johnson's 'image schemata' (1987: 18-40) may prove useful in this respect. Their 'schematic structure' is in agreement with the 'schematic' nature of grammatical meaning (Langacker 1991: 325). Their bodily and interactional basis lends itself to 'KineGrams' – conceptualizing gestures I devised in order to define the central properties of grams.

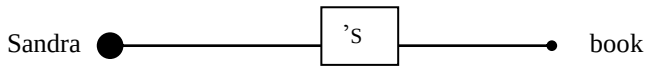
Consider the following:

(a) **the 's genitive**.

How can a supposedly 'empty' case marker be a factor of polysemy?

Sandra's sister (kinship); *Sandra's book* (authorship or ownership); *Sandra's error* (responsibility), etc.

I used the LINK schema to characterize the core relational properties of the 'inflected genitive construction':



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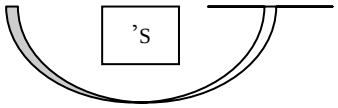
Two entities are closely (or tightly) connected. One is used as the 'landmark' or 'reference point'.

KineGram: a corresponding hand movement, from left to right, as the 'S gram is realized phonetically (/s/, /z/, /ziz/):



(b) **the superlative:** 'going to extremes', 'stretched to the limit'

An extremity is reached (on a horizontal or vertical axis):

'Reaching the top' seems to make a lot of sense to learners (e.g. 'top singers' are 'the best singers'). What is more, it is in keeping with the in-built verticality metaphor of the word 'superlative' (from Latin *superus* 'placed above'). Yet the 'top', 'peak', 'high up', etc. construal of the superlative is not entirely reliable. What is 'above' tends to be rated positively (because of the POWER IS UP and BETTER IS UP metaphors). The problem is that not all superlative constructions have positive meanings: e.g. 'the worst', 'the lousiest', etc. It is thus more accurate to speak of 'an extremity being reached' – positive or negative.

KineGram: (Option 1) full extension of the body with feet and hands stretched to a maximum as '-st' is realized phonetically. (Option 2) hand closed in a fist as the base form of the adjective is uttered (e.g. 'big'). Full, sudden extension of fingers as superlative form is uttered (e.g. 'biggeST').

3.2. New narratives

Using narrative to conceptualize grammar is seen as a startling innovation among language instructors. Yet, what looks like an invention is a mere *extension* of storytelling to a particular field of knowledge – grammar – where fables, tales or epics are not normally heard. From a cognitive perspective, constructing grammatical meaning narratively is in no way different from constructing moral, spiritual or philosophical meanings in tale, fable, parable or allegory form. It is neither 'odd' nor 'gimmicky'.

There are indeed some very legitimate reasons for applying narrative structure to grammatical discourse.

(a) As Mark Johnson remarks, we are 'narrative creatures' who constantly engage in the 'narrative rationalizations of our actions'. Many of the stories we tell about ourselves are 'culturally accepted modes of explanation'(1997: 158). In view of this principle, narrative rationalizations of verbal behavior and linguistic structure are bound to appeal to the human mind.

(b) Our common cultural experience of fiction, drama and film shows that we learn and remember more from a dramatized account than we do from any serious treatise. The plots, the situations and the characters found in novels or movies are often conducive to thought and have much greater intellectual appeal than formal essays. Hence the idea of inventing grammatical tales with a central character-narrator, *Magic Lingo*, 'the spirit of language' (Fr. *le génie de la langue*). French uses the same word *génie* for 'genie' (a magical spirit) and 'genius' (someone with an unusually high level of intelligence or creativity). Calling *Magic Lingo* 'le génie de la langue' allows a play on words. The creature is instantly framed as supernatural, helpful and, most of all, knowledgeable.

(c) Narrative provides a synthesizing structure for rich grammatical configurations. It organizes knowledge and brings together what would otherwise appear as a collection of scattered remarks. A good illustration of this can be found in the 'Ocean beach story' (grade 6), where *Magic Lingo* explains the origin of the word 'past' and discusses our construal of time, experience and memory.

> ***Ocean Beach*** (grade 6) [opening paragraphs]
> Last summer, I went to the ocean side. The beaches there are sandy and stretch for miles. As I walked along at low tide, my feet left marks in the sand. Every time I turned round, I could see a trail of footprints. They seemed to go on for miles!
>
> Life is a long, long walk too. You go to kindergarten and then move on to primary school. You never stop moving forward! Sometimes, you look back and catch a glimpse of everything you **passed** on your way to the present moment.
> Where exactly are you now? If you look back in time, do you see anything?
> Some things you can still see very clearly. But pictures fade and footprints wash away with the tide…

This story was initially written for French pupils. The conceptual link between *passé* ('the past'), *pas* ('footsteps') and *passer* [*par*] ('walk by / past') was easily established for obvious morphological reasons. Also, the origin of *passé* (from Latin *passus* 'step') was instantly perceived by French listeners. In just a few lines, the story allowed me to introduce a whole new collection of conceptual metaphors that I later developed to discuss the English preterit:

LIFE AS A PATH
LIVING AS WALKING OR MOVING FORWARD
CHANGE AS MOTION
EXPERIENCE AS MARKS MADE OR PLACES VISITED
REMEMBERING AS LOOKING BACK
CLEAR MEMORIES AS VISIBLE MARKS
etc.

In the most general terms, the *Magic Lingo* stories can be defined as synthetic, imaginative conceptualizations of grammar.

Sometimes the story is merely illustrative, in which case it simply shows the prototypical use of a form:
– 'can' used in a job interview to discuss the applicant's abilities (e.g. 'Can you sing?')
– 'be going to' used to predict the future from aspects of the present situation (e.g. 'It's going to rain')

Even then, *Magic Lingo* is always careful to provide a cognitive interpretation of grammatical usage:

– ‘can’ is described as a ‘free way’ or a ‘smooth path’ leading to a particular action-location (Fr. *la voie est libre*; *ça roule tout seul*).
– ‘be going to’ is interpreted spatially as ‘heading directly for’… or ‘being already on the way to…’ some action-destination (Fr. *on se dirige déjà vers l’action*; *c’est bien parti pour se faire*).

More often than not, *Magic Lingo*’s stories are built around some ‘true’ or ‘fanciful’ episode in the character’s life, some fascinating myth or some established cultural ritual. The plot is used to bring out a key structural feature or some cognitive mechanism relevant to the grammatical construction under consideration:

– in the ‘Time machine’ story (grade 7), *Magic Lingo* travels back in time with Shakespeare to witness the real murder of Caesar by Brutus. Both characters are seen tripping down history’s path and breaking away from present reality. This is a way of showing the disconnectedness marked by *–ed* in the English tense and modal system.

– in ‘the alchemy of *–ing*’ story (grade 7), *-ing* is described as ‘the philosopher’s stone of English grammar’. Alchemists were looking for the substance that would turn ordinary metals into gold. They failed lamentably. English speakers have been more successful. They have found the morph that turns verbs into nouns (e.g. *write* => *writing*). The structural similarity is clear: alchemy and nominalization are both about conversion and recategorization. But there is a difference: the former appeals to the imagination of a 12-year-old whereas the latter does not. By allowing a conceptual transfer to take place between the mythical world of alchemy and the more pedestrian reality of English grammar, the story bridges the gap between imagination and reason.

– in the ‘Central Park’ story, New Yorkers are seen walking their dogs. Some are held on leashes, others run about freely. Whether visible or invisible, the link between the owners and their dogs is encoded linguistically by ‘s’ in the ’s genitive (e.g. ‘Ben’s dog’).

Conclusion

Applied cognitive grammar is still in its infancy. Can ‘airy-fairy’ descriptions of English syntax succeed in the supposedly real and unforgiving world of secondary education?

The prevailing view in France is that teachers are weary of ‘reforms’ in educational methodology and wary of ‘revolutions’. Few are willing to embrace a new philosophy of grammar without strong evidence that ‘it really works in the classroom’.

Over 80,000 books covering grades 1 and 2 have been sold in less than a year – a most encouraging figure.

Preliminary surveys have shown that pupils respond well to narrative and imaginative devices. The *Magic Lingo* stories truly ‘make sense’ to young learners, both as stories in their own right and as imaginative conceptualizations of grammar. Equally meaningful to learners is the relationship set up between grammar and gesture (‘KineGrams’). Some of the ‘mimed’ or ‘choreographed’ definitions of grams provide a truly embodied experience of grammatical meaning (e.g. stretched arms or fingers for the superlative; a semicircular movement of the arm representing ‘ever’ in ‘Have you ever seen / been to…?’). But most of all, the cognitive links set up between ‘percept’ and ‘concept’, ‘emotion’ and ‘rationalization’ have made a strong impact on pupils’ minds: coercion as a force pushing you in the back (e.g. *You must go now*); absolute necessity as a chain preventing escape (e.g. *I have to get up at 6*); high or low predictability as a ‘clear’ or ‘blurred’ picture of the future (e.g. *She will / may come)*. The accessibility of grammatical concepts has been greatly enhanced by the constant reference made to shared perceptual and cultural experience.

So far, French academics have reacted rather cautiously to my work. Some have warned me that the *applied* cognitive grammar I was devising would eventually weaken my status as a theoretician. As we all know, any subject that dares to call itself ‘applied’ is bound to be devalued in academia.

More seriously, fellow linguists have objected to the way in which cognitive linguistics seems to challenge the ‘autonomy principle’ of grammar and translate highly abstract or schematic symbolic structure into experiential concepts ruled by principles of ‘naïve physics’. This is a serious objection that we must all address at some point if we are to establish the full credibility of the ‘cognitive enterprise’.

Will cognitive grammar thrive and prosper in the French Education System? What happens when the curtain falls am I sometimes asked. Once the ‘*Magic Lingo* show’ is over, the serious business of syntax must be dealt with somehow. And there’s no room for imaginative reason, metaphoric catch phrases and ‘touchy-feely’ descriptions there! Like it or not, it’s ‘grammar as usual’. It’s back to the grim reality of morphs and patterns.

Or is it? The *Grammar Explorer* section in the *Learner’s Workbook* contains probably more syntax and morphology than has ever been taught in French schools. The ‘exploration’ is just different in tone and comes in a different format.

I may well have developed an art of 'grammatical entertainment', but in no way do I see myself as an entertainer. Never has so much grammatical terminology (e.g. 'auxiliary', 'affix', 'marker', 'modal') been discussed and explained. And should any doubt persist as to the seriousness of the intellectual method followed, the accompanying *Fichier d'utilisation* ('Instructor's Handbook') provides a detailed discussion of all the syntactic and morphological issues addressed in the stories.

What I believe is the true achievement of the *Hachette Education* project is that proof has been given that the conceptual metaphors encoded in any given language are cognitively real. They make sense to learners. Set in the appropriate grammatical context, they provide invaluable help in conceptualizing syntactic phenomena. As shown in our brief discussion of 'have to' in English, there is an element of 'binding' involved in our understanding of absolute necessity, as the phrases 'bound by necessity', 'bound by law', *tenu d'agir* (lit. 'held to act') suggest. This is why imaginative descriptions in which the grammatical subject is 'tied' or 'chained' to the action make so much sense to learners. Here, as anywhere else, other metaphoric resources are available: action-containers may hold the agentive subject 'captive', thus preventing an easy 'escape'. This is reflected in such common phrases as 'there's no way out of it', 'you won't get away with it' (Fr. *tu n'y échapperas pas*, lit. 'you won't escape this'). Or there might be one and only one path leading to the action-location, no alternative route, 'no other way'.

The image schemata and mappings which a lexically encoded in language are living structures of knowledge. They are – or can be made –*conceptually active*. They are the very foundation of a cognitive grammar of English which learners enjoy and derive much intellectual profit from.

And that should be enough to keep us going in the new millennium.

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Keywords
applied cognitive linguistics; cognitive grammar; conceptualization; embodied grammatical meaning; event structure; gesture; gram; imaginative reason; modality; narrative.

Abstract
Grammatical objectivism is the belief that grammar is a purely technical, ideologically neutral subject, which uses the conceptual apparatus of a body-free reason. Grammatical concepts thus represent objective and disembodied features of language. The ultimate purpose of formal descriptions is to establish the "hard facts" of syntax.
Cognitive grammar offers an unprecedented opportunity to challenge this view. The knowledge systems used to conceptualize language are viewed as fundamentally embodied and imaginative. Standard grammatical concepts can be understood via perception, movement, metaphor and narrative. New 'accounts' of syntax may thus be given that assume overt kinetic and narrative structure.

This paper describes some aspects of the ambitious *Spring into English* project (© *Hachette Education*, France) in which I have been involved as a cognitive linguistics scholar. The presentation is based on the first course books published so far, intended for learners aged 10-13 (*classes de 6e et 5e des collèges* 'grades 1 & 2, French junior high').

Having mapped the knowledge systems commonly used to reason about language and traced the pre-conceptual roots of standard grammatical notions, I proceed to show the embodied, non-arbitrary nature of grammatical meaning. I then composed 'grammatical tales', using the conceptualizing and imaginative resources of narrative, metaphor and personification and choreographed 'grammatical gestures' using perception and movement to define grammatical meaning.