Abstract:
Second language researchers studying learner attention and noticing have shown that learning a linguistic structure requires attention to the structure; therefore, productive use of a specific linguistic form by a learner first requires parsing the structure into its component parts. Parsing of the structure in its context of authentic use also uncovers the function and meaning of the linguistic unit. As a form/meaning pair is parsed and its functions are understood by the learner, the structure can then be used productively for communication.

Language educators have developed several teaching methodologies to increase learner awareness and parsing of constructions, including Focus on Form (FoF) and language awareness. The main weaknesses of FoF and language awareness are that the methods address how to teach grammar but not what structures to teach. In addition, the methods do not address the processes of the mind, such as noticing and parsing, which affect language learning, comprehension, and use. Overall, FoF and language awareness do not explicitly include a theory of language or a theory of cognition; yet, both types of theory are needed to employ the results of research in attention in language teaching pedagogy.

To overcome these problems, cognitive-linguistic approaches to language teaching have been explored, including Construction Grammar Theory (CGT). Unlike FoF and language awareness, CGT specifically includes the learning of form/meaning constructions in its view of language learning, and addresses the need for a theory of language and a theory of cognition identified by second language researchers. Overall, CGT offers several advantages which address important aspects of language learning discussed by second language researchers, and has the potential to resolve the pedagogical problems.

The study discussed in this presentation employed CGT to design a pedagogical method for teaching grammar to second language learners. A critical analysis of previous work in grammar pedagogy is presented first, including the strengths and weaknesses of several current teaching methods. The potential benefits of CGT are then discussed in detail. Finally, a model for teaching the English ditransitive construction is proposed. The study is an attempt to apply current theory in linguistics to the teaching of grammar, in order to bridge the gap between language theory and teaching practice.