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The studies presented in this book argue that exploring the grammatical system outside the communicative flow enables students to develop clearer knowledge of this system and to become more effective in their language use.

This approach is the outcome of research revolving around the role of metalinguistic knowledge in learning how to write. According to this research, language use and metalinguistic activity are interdependent.

The international debate on the effect of grammar instruction on writing skills has been dominated by an overly causal approach which ignores core considerations such as the teaching procedures that we use to reflect upon the grammar system in the classroom and the way we conceptualise this system.

This book highlights the need to encourage students to engage in metalinguistic activity, in which verbalisation and data manipulation should play a key role. It also emphasises the importance of conceptualising the grammar system as an organic entity resulting from the integration of form, meaning and the intention of the speaker.

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P. I. E. PETER LANG
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9783039107514-301-8



9 782575 1742018

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GRAMM...
REVUES DE LINGUISTIQUE FRANÇAISE

Teresa Ribas, Xavier Fontich
and Oriol Guasch (eds.)

Grammar at School

Research on Metalinguistic Activity
in Language Education



Teresa Rivas, Xavier Fontich and Oriol Guasch (eds.)

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Research on Metalinguistic
Activity in Language Education

GRAMM-R
Vol. 23

Financial support for publication: Proyecto I+D del MINECO, ref. EDU2011-26039, 2012-2014, dir. Dra. Teresa Ribas (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).



Table of Contents

Foreword.....	9
<i>Debra Myhill</i>	
Introduction.....	11
<i>Teresa Ribas, Xavier Fontich and Oriol Guasch</i>	
Metalinguistic activity in language learning.....	25
<i>Anna Camps</i>	
Working on grammar at school.....	43
<i>Maria Milian</i>	
Evaluative analysis of the instructional approach to studying syntactic coordination in ten secondary school textbooks.....	75
<i>Ricardo Coronas</i>	
Verb tenses in primary school textbooks.....	111
<i>Mireia Torraïba</i>	
The use of metalinguistic terms in writing activities in early primary school classrooms.....	141
<i>Rosa Gil and Montserrat Bigas</i>	
The notion of verb mood in students in compulsory secondary education.....	173
<i>Carme Durán Rivas</i>	
“When does that happen?” Recognition of the retrospective usage of the present tense among primary school students.....	209
<i>Mariona Casas</i>	
Reflexive knowledge of the past tenses in Spanish.....	227
<i>Carmen Rodríguez Gonzalo</i>	
Grammar and language reflection at school: Checking out the whats and the hows of grammar instruction.....	253
<i>Xavier Fontich</i>	
Authors.....	283

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© P.L.E. PETER LANG S.A.
Éditions scientifiques internationales
Brussels, 2014
1 avenue Maurice, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium
info@peterlang.com; www.peterlang.com

ISSN 2030-2363
ISBN 978-2-87574-201-8
eISBN 978-3-0352-6490-6
D/2014/5678/95

Printed in Germany

Cip available from the British Library, UK and from the Library of Congress, USA.
Bibliographic information published by “Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek”.

“Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek” lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available on the internet at <<http://dnb.d-nb.de>>.

"When does that happen?" Recognition
of the retrospective usage of the present tense
among primary school students

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Introduction

The study presented in this chapter is based on the verb as a grammatical category that articulates the temporality of linguistic utterances. The verb is an extremely complex notion that structures the expression of time through the system of verb tenses. This system enables us to situate events by taking the moment of utterance as a point of reference. However, the relationships and time meanings that verbs are capable of expressing are multiple and intertwined.

From the educational standpoint, the intrinsic complexity of verbs makes this grammatical notion a subject that is difficult to grasp in all its dimensions (morphological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic). Regarding the system of verb tenses, schools have primarily focused on morphological contents and on basic time distinction (past-present-future) and have barely examined the relationship between verb forms and their usages. In the case of the present tense, knowledge in primary school is not constructed upon the usages associated with this verb tense.

This study is based on two hypotheses. The first is that students' explicit knowledge of the present tense mainly stems from a simplification at school, which identifies this verb tense solely with expressions of simultaneity with the speech act. This simultaneous meaning, which indicates a match between the time of utterance and the time the situation occurred, is considered the core or prototypical usage of the present tense and is the usage that distinguishes it from the other two basic tenses (past and future).

The second hypothesis posits that the univocal identification of the present tense with the moment of the utterance may lead students to contradictory situations when they are faced with other usages of the present tense that are common in speakers' everyday usage. In the

perspective of cognitive linguistics (Cuenca and Hilferty, 1999), these meanings are the non-canonical usages, such as the habitual, timeless, prospective and retrospective meanings of the present tense.

This study precisely encourages a cognitive conflict (Giordan, 1996) to arise which forces students to come to terms with these non-canonical usages following a teaching-learning strategy that underscores the importance of examining the language through problems and taking it as an object of reflection (Camps, 2009; Fisher, 2004). To this end, this study demonstrates that, in order to help students understand that the present tense is also used to express usages other than simultaneity with the speech act, the learner must reflect on these other uses. In this study, reflection is promoted through a teaching activity that revolves around interaction (Millan, 2005).

Therefore, the objective is twofold: first, to encourage students to reflect on the usages of the present tense; and secondly, to discover how they come to recognise and understand these non-canonical usages. To achieve the first objective, we confront students with some non-canonical usages of this verb tense, while the second objective is attained by analysing the dilemmas that students run into, and the strategies they use to overcome them.

In this chapter, we share the exploration of a non-canonical usage of the present tense, specifically the retrospective value (*praesens tabulare*) based on the following four research questions:

- (1) What knowledge of the retrospective meaning of the present tense do students have?
- (2) What kinds of strategies do they use to discover this meaning?
- (3) How is knowledge of this meaning constructed?
- (4) What is the relationship between usage and reflective knowledge of this meaning?

The chapter is divided into five parts, which describe the theoretical framework (part 1), the research methodology (part 2), the results (part 3), the conclusions (part 4) and the teaching implications derived from this study (part 5).

Theoretical framework of the research: From linguistics to language teaching

The theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning this study revolves around two main fields: linguistics and teaching. The former uses linguistics and psycholinguistics to take the verb and tense as subjects of study while the latter takes the notions of verb and tense as subjects of school teaching and learning.

Linguistics

This field is approached from a threefold perspective: the descriptive facet of the linguistic system, the acquisition of this system by children, and the expression of the notion of time in languages.

From the standpoint of descriptive linguistics, the retrospective usage of the present tense is a derived usage of this verb tense that can be found in all grammars. For example, *Gramàtica del català contemporani* states that the present "can be used in past contexts in situations in which the reference time is situated before the speech act" (Pérez Saldanya, 2002, p. 2597). It is precisely because it is the least marked tense in the verb system, in the sense that morphologically it has no time markers, that the present can function "extensively and take on the meaning of the marked time" (2002, p. 2619), such as the past in the case of the retrospective usage.

With regard to language acquisition, this study is based on the earliest studies on how children acquire the notion of time (Piaget, 1946), but it is situated within the sociocultural perspective via the contributions of Tartas (2009). According to this psychologist, children temporalise their experiences through language in accordance with both their cognitive development and the social construction of time meanings used by adults.

With regard to the expression of temporality in languages, Klein (2009) asserts that languages have developed at least six devices to temporally anchor linguistic utterances: verb tense, morphological aspect, lexical aspect (these first three have to do with the grammatical category of the verb), temporal adverbials (Klein, 2009, p. 64), temporal particles (Klein, 2009, p. 69), and discourse principles.

Finally, to build a bridge between linguistics and teaching, this study also encompasses the contributions of cognitive linguistics (Langacker, 1987; Cuenca and Hilferty, 1999) which enable us to examine the notion of the present verb tense from the point of view of its usages based on the prototype theory, ranging from the prototypical usage (simultaneity with the speech act) to non-canonical usages (the other usages of the present tense).

Teaching

Precisely because they are complex notions, both verbs and verb tenses are teaching contents that are difficult to deal with in the classroom. From the teaching standpoint, this research is based on a variety of studies on teaching verbs in primary school, particularly in the francophone tradition, which corroborate the complexity of verbs as the subject of teaching-learning.

These previous studies claim that verbs are dealt with at school from a multidimensional perspective, stretching beyond morphological constraints and thus also encompassing the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions of this notion (Gourdet, 2010; Lepoivre-Duc and Sautot, 2009; Vaguer and Leeman, 2005; Vaguer and Lavieu, 2004). They also state the need to bear in mind the students' initial language knowledge, which should serve as the point of departure for new learning at school (Beaumanoir-Secq, Cogis and Elalouf, 2010; Dourojeanni and Quet, 2007).

With regard to the prescriptive framework, the studies have noted that the importance and complexity of verbs does not translate into the prominent presence of this grammatical category in the curricular contents of primary school in Catalonia (Decret 142/2007). Nor does the way verbs are dealt with in textbooks, primarily from a morphological perspective, help to reveal the full dimensions of this notion (Ribas, 2010).

Educators' interest in rethinking how to deal with verbs at school is part of an avenue of research that underscores the need to develop a kind of pedagogical grammar (Taylor, 1993; Zayas, 2004; Nadeau and Fisher, 2006) that entails reflective teaching and learning which include both linguistic knowledge and usage. According to these referents, this research is also based on studies on classroom interaction in which dialogue among peers and with adults (Mercer, 1995; Mondada, 2002) can become a means through which knowledge is constructed. In this study, we consider interaction and metalinguistic activity as key elements in the construction of grammatical knowledge (Milian, 2005).

Design and methodology of the research

This research is envisioned as a multiple case study that explores the recognition and understanding of the usages of the present tense by 86 schoolchildren in a semi-natural setting (at school but outside the classroom), in which an oral educational intervention is undertaken in pairs with the discursive aid of the researcher. The participants are 19 pairs of 3rd grade students (8-9 years old) and 24 pairs of 6th grade students (11-12 years old). They all study at three state primary schools in Catalonia (Spain), and Catalan is either their L1 or L2.

The verbal interaction that develops in this instructional situation serves as the basis of the objective analysis; specifically, through the conversation we observe how the construction of knowledge takes place in this specific situation. In fact, the same activity also generates reflection, leading grammatical knowledge (the actual subject of analysis) to emerge from the exploration of language in use (Fontich, 2010).

The activity designed is upheld in planning instructional sequences to learn grammar (Camps and Zayas, 2006) using the procedures of observation, analysis, manipulation and verbalisation by students. It is also characterised by being grounded upon language usage, following one of the cornerstones of cognitive linguistics, which states that observation and analysis of the linguistic system should not be based on ideal models but on real language situations (Cuenca, 2000). Finally, the activity adheres to the following instructional criterion (Milian, 2005): "Having students deal with situations, observations and interesting problems that question them and mobilise their desire to discover how the elements being analysed work" (p. 26).

The instructional device in this study consists of different oral activities that promote student reflection based on reading utterances (sentences and texts) that spotlight the use of different usages of the present tense (the prototypical, the timeless, the prospective and the retrospective). The students were confronted with the retrospective usage of the present tense – the meaning being explored in this chapter – with the following two sentences:

- (1) In the 15th century, Columbus discovers America
- (2) In 1969, mankind reaches the Moon

Both sentences show a mismatch between the time of the situation (the time at which the events happened) and the time of the utterance (the time at which the utterance is expressed), and they therefore pose the possibility of prompting cognitive conflict. Indeed, the shared feature of the two sentences is the retrospective displacement of the core of the utterance (the point of speech), which is situated sometime in the past. Specifically, sentence (1) takes place "in the 15th century", while sentence (2) "in 1969". In both cases, the time of the situation is expressed through temporal modifiers, namely prepositional phrases that serve as circumstantial complements of time.

From the methodological standpoint, all the conversations that arose in the instructional device were audio-recorded, transcribed, segmented into episodes and categorised according to the research questions. The unit of analysis that emerged from the segmentation is the episode, which the researcher opens and closes through her role as the manager of the course of the conversation. Table 1 below shows an example of the segmentation of sentence (1) ("In the 15th century, Columbus discovers America") based on a conversation with one pair of students:¹

¹ In the conversation excerpts presented, the quotes that start with the letter "R" indicate the researcher; the ones beginning with the other letters correspond to the initials of the pseudonyms of the students (in the case of the pair shown in Table 1, pair 25, P & B only).

Table 1. Segmentation of the conversation on sentence (1) in pair 25 (6th grade)

N.	Title of the episode	Excerpts within the episodes
1	Recognition of the time of the situation	1. M: "In the 15 th century - Columbus discovers America" 2. R: When does that happen/ 3. P: Past\ 4. M: In the 15 th century\<
2	Identification of the time modifiers	5. R: How do you know that it's past- Paula/ 6. P: Because we're no longer in the 15 th century\ 7. R: What century are we in/ 8. P and M: The 21 st 9. R: And is this before or after now/ 10. P: Before\ 11. M: After\ I mean- the 15 th century is before - right\ Before\<
3	Identification of the verb in the sentence	12. R: Right\ And is there a verb in this sentence/ 13. M: Yes- <i>discovers</i> \
4	Recognition of the time of the utterance	14. R: And when does <i>discovers</i> happen/ 15. P: Now\<
5	Recognition of the cognitive conflict	16. M: Now:: Mm:: Hey\ (laughter) (5 seconds) 17. P: I mean it's a question like in the first text we've read::<
6	Strategies to resolve the cognitive conflict	18. M: That means that if you say a verb in the present might it- depending on the other words- might it also be past- present and future/ 19. R: Wow- this question you're asking is very interesting\ It could be- right/ Why do you say that- Miquel/ 20. M: Because we've seen the other texts- sometimes they have the verb in the present and:: but:: but it means the past\ 21. R: Wow:: so- what we said before- that the present means now- it seems like that isn't always true- right/ What do you think/ 22. M: No\ 23. P: Because part of a sentence could be in the past and another part in the present\ 24. M: And then- that's right- in theory you should know it from- from:: with from the other part of the sentence\ 25. R: Ah- wow- good job\<

With regard to the categorisation (based on the segmentation into episodes), the purpose is not solely to classify the responses to the

and M is Miquel). Pairs 1 to 19 are in 3rd grade, while pairs 20 to 43 are in 6th grade. The transcription criteria are an adaptation of Payrató (1996) (cf. Casas, 2012, online).

different episodes but to record what kind of responses are elicited, that is, to account for the knowledge that the pairs display and their ability to reflect on grammar. For this reason, we followed a codification and open categorisation procedure based on the dialogues, which enabled us to describe the strategies used by the students to resolve the cognitive conflict in sentences 1 and 2. The codification yielded the following categories:²

- Morphological strategy. Interpretation of the temporal meaning of the verb based on its morphology.
- Semantic strategy. Interpretation of the temporal meaning of the verb based on the semantic information in the temporal modifier.
- World knowledge or experiential strategy. Interpretation of the temporal meaning of the verb according to the pairs' world or experiential knowledge.
- Metalinguistic strategy. Interpretation of the temporal meaning of the verb based on the pairs' metalinguistic reasoning. This strategy (as explained in the section below) is generated by (or can generate) the emergence of other strategies or the relationship among them through interaction.

Results

This section explores how the pairs recognise and justify the mismatch between the time of the situation, meaning the time of the events narrated (in the past, anchored by the temporal codifiers) and the time of the utterance, meaning the time when the events are narrated (which is expressed in the present tense) based on the conversation about the two sentences. First, we show what strategies the students use to recognise the time of the utterance, and based on that we analyse how the pairs in third and sixth grade resolve the cognitive conflict entailed in these mismatched times.

When faced with the researcher's question to ascertain whether the pairs know what tense *discovers* is in (sentence 1: "In the 15th century, Columbus discovers America"), a request the researcher makes in the early turns of the conversation, the most noteworthy finding is that there is not a single 3rd grade pair that says that the verb is in the present tense; instead, all the pairs stick with the time of the situation (semantic strategy), which is why they believe that *discovers* is in the past. This is illustrated below with pair 7:

² Examples of each strategy are illustrated in the following section.

Table 2. Example of the response of a 3rd grade pair (semantic strategy)

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 1)
7 (3 rd)	17. R: What verb is it/ 18. S: <i>Discovers</i> \ 19. R: Very good\ And this verb - when does what this verb describes happen/ 20. S: In the past\ 21. R: How do you know/ 22. S: Because:: because now they say 2000 and here there's a century\ 23. R: But what does <i>discovers</i> mean/ 24. S: That America had been discovered\ 25. R: And <i>discovers</i> is in the present - in the past or in the future/ 26. S: In the past\ 27. M: Right - in the past\ 28. R: Definitely/ 29. M and S: Yes\

In contrast, many of the 6th grade pairs initially state that *discovers* is in the present tense, as seen in the example below, meaning that the verb tense is what anchors the sentence (morphological strategy):

Table 3. Example of the response of a 6th grade pair (morphological strategy)

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 1)
43 (6 th)	11. O: <i>Discovered</i> - the present <i>discovers</i> and the future <i>will discover</i> \ 12. R: So when does it happen/ 13. O: Now\ 14. A: Now\ 15. R: Now/ Columbus <i>discovers</i> America now/ 16. A: Yes- because of <i>discovers</i> \

The same holds true in sentence 2 ("In 1969, mankind reaches the Moon"); that is, not a single 3rd grade pair believes that *reaches* is in the present, nor is there any 6th grade pair that claims that *reaches* is in the past. This is illustrated below with two examples, one from the 3rd grade (pair 2) and one from the 6th grade (pair 34):

Table 4. Example of the responses of 3rd and 6th grade pairs in sentence 2

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 2)
2 (3 rd)	10. R: So in what tense is- this verb/ 11. N: In the past:: Because if that happened in 1969::: 12. G: I guess it's in the past\

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 2)
34 (6 th)	6. R: Is there a verb in this sentence/ 7. T: Yes\ 8. R: What verb is it/ 9. F: <i>Reaches</i> \ 10. R: And what is <i>reaches</i> / 11. F: A verb in the present tense\ 12. T: Now\

Therefore, it seems that knowledge of the verb paradigm (morphological knowledge) leads some 6th grade pairs to prioritise the time of the utterance over the time of the situation, while in the 3rd grade pairs this knowledge is not yet manifested. Indeed, in both sentence 1 and sentence 2, we can see that being questioned about the verb forms *discovers* and *reaches* prompts no conflict in the 3rd grade pairs. All the pairs believe that the verb is in the past; that is, they do not perceive that the verb is morphologically in the present form.

In contrast, some of the 6th grade pairs stumble upon the dilemma that the verb is in the present tense even though the sentence refers to the past, which can lead to cognitive conflict: clearly both sentence 1 and sentence 2 are anchored in the past through the temporal modifiers "in the 15th century" (sentence 1) and "in 1969" (sentence 2). If the pairs analyse the verb form in isolation (which is what the researcher asks them to do with the question: "What verb tense is *discovers/reaches*?"), those who correctly identify that the verb is in the present tense find this incompatible with the time of the situation. Therefore, it seems that the 6th grade students' knowledge of the present tense is basically morphological (from the standpoint of its usages, they identify this verb tense with the simultaneous meaning), and this knowledge is what leads them to cognitive conflict (the aforementioned incompatibility). To resolve this conflict, we have to deal with the following question: How did the pairs resolve the incompatibility between the semantic information from the temporal modifiers and the morphological information expressed by the verb tense?

Below we discuss the course of conversations to resolve the cognitive conflict, first in the 3rd grade pairs and then in the 6th grade pairs.

Course of the conversations in the 3rd grade pairs

As mentioned above, in the initial conversations the 3rd grade pairs believe that the verb forms *discovers/reaches* are in the past tense. Thus, in these pairs, there is initially no conflict because they do not realise that the verb form is in the present tense, and therefore they find no mismatch between the time expressed by the verb form (time of the utterance) and the "time expressed in the sentence" (time of the situation). When the researcher pushes the conversation further to find out whether they realise

that *discovers* or *reaches* is in the present tense (posing the cognitive conflict), the majority of the pairs confirm that the sentences are in the past by focusing on the temporal modifiers (that is, they prioritise the semantic strategy).

Below are two excerpts that illustrate how the 3rd grade pairs reasoned. The first shows the strategy they used to make both times match (the time of the situation and the time of the utterance), while the second illustrates the fragility of their morphological knowledge.

Example 1: Semantic manipulation

Once they become aware of the conflict, that is, once the conversation has made them aware that the time expressed by the verb does not match the time expressed by the temporal modifier, some 3rd grade pairs try to resolve this mismatch by making both times identical. The pairs try to make the two times match by suggesting other temporal modifiers, that is, by semantically manipulating the sentence. Below (Table 5) is the conversation of a 3rd grade pair who displace the time of the utterance to the time of the situation.

Table 5. Example in which a 3rd grade pair displaces the time of the utterance to the time of the situation

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 1)
3 (3 rd)	18. R: And <i>discovers</i> - what verb is that/ 19. T: <i>Discovers</i> :: <i>discover</i> \ 20. C: To discover something\ 21. R: But:: 22. T: To find something\ 23. R: What tense is it in/ 24. C: (5 seconds) In the past\ 25. R: In the past/ 26. C: (5s.) Yes- in the past- because it happened a few centuries ago\ 27. R: What would it be like in the present/ 28. C: In the present- now\ "In the 21 st century Columbus disco...- uh- in the (5s.) In this century- Columbus <i>discovers</i> America\ In <i>this</i> century\ 29. R: But isn't that the same verb as in the previous sentence / 30. T: Yes- because it's the opposite\ This is present ((thinking)) (5s.) 31. C: What do you mean- <i>will discover</i> \ <i>Will discover</i> is future\ 32. T: When someone discovers something- we say "he has discovered something": 33. C: We've discovered an invention to not- to not:: 34. T: In the past it would be "in the 15 th century Columbus <i>discovered</i> America" 35. R: So- this sentence I gave you isn't right "in the 15 th century- Columbus <i>discovers</i> America" 36. T: It is, too- you can say it both ways\ If you want to shorten it more- you can say it like the sentence- but if you're a scholar and you want to say it perfectly- you can say "in the 15 th century Columbus <i>discovered</i> America"

In the excerpt above, since the students initially believe that *discovers* is in the past (turn 24), the researcher asks them to say the sentence in the present (turn 27). When Carles (C) tries to do so (turn 28), he realises that he has to change the temporal modifier and introduce the demonstrative *this* in its deictic function to make the sentence present. What this manipulation reveals is that he is trying to match both times by modifying the element of the sentence that was not in the present (the temporal modifier). Despite this manipulation, the researcher points their attention (turn 29) to the fact that in the sentence that Carles has made, the verb form *discovers* is the same as in the initial sentence (which they had said was in the past). Toni (T) then answers (turn 30) that the sentence that Carles made is in the present, unlike the researcher's sentence, so that he claims that the change in the temporal modifier "in the 15th century" to "in this century" turns the past tense sentence into present.

In any case, at the end of the conversation the students admit that the sentence can be said using both verb tenses (present and past), but Toni's last comment (turn 36) indicates that he believes that the sentence is more correct in the past tense. From this excerpt, it is worth noting that the pair manipulated the temporal modifiers, that is, the semantic material of the sentence (instead of the morphological material) to resolve the conflict that was brought to their attention. Likewise, at the beginning of the conversation, the pair tries to resolve the problem by semantically exploring the verb (turns 20 and 22). Therefore, it seems that for this reason, and because they manipulate the sentence using the temporal modifiers, semantics prevails over morphology.

Example 2: Morphological fragility

The second example reveals the fragility of the morphological strategy in the 3rd grade pairs. Pair 2 (Table 6) starts with the conviction that *discovers* (sentence 1) is in the past, and at the end of the conversation keeps the priority of the time of the situation, after having revealed weaknesses in the morphological argument.

Table 6. Example of a 3rd grade pair that shows the fragility of their morphological knowledge

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 1)
2 (3 rd)	6. R: And the tense of this verb- how is it/ What is it- present- past or future/ 7. N: Past:: 8. R: <i>Discovers</i> is past/ 9. G: (6 seconds) <i>Discovers</i> - yes\ 10. R: <i>Discovers</i> is past/ 11. N: No:: 12. G: Because the past is <i>discovered</i> ; the present is <i>I discover</i> and the future would be <i>I will discover</i> \

- | |
|--|
| 13. R: So what tense is- this verb/ |
| 14. G: (5s.) Present or future\ |
| 15. N: Or past:: |
| 16. G: Since it says "in the 15 th century" it doesn't matter if it's in the present- past or future- afterwards\ |

In the excerpt above, pair 2 believes that *discovers* is in the past (turns 7 and 9), yet after the researcher's insistence (in turn 9, Gina [G] took 6 seconds to answer), Nil (N) begins to question this (turn 11) and then Gina applies the strategy of citing the basic tense distinction (turn 12). The problem is that this technique ends up not working because she does it by conjugating the verb in the first person singular, and therefore to refer to the present she says *I discover* (turn 12) instead of *he discovers* (which is third person singular, what she should have conjugated to make it identical to the verb in the sentence).

This means that when the researcher asks about the verb tense again, Gina answers "present or future" (turn 14); that is, she contradicts what she had said earlier. In contrast, Nil is reaffirmed since he believes that *discovers* is in the "past" (turn 15). In any case, in the last turn of the conversation, Gina mentions the temporal modifier to anchor the time of the sentence, as if she were trying to ignore the verb tense (turn 16). What should be underscored in this excerpt is that this pair is trying to use the morphological strategy but it does not work because they make the basic tense distinction (past-present-future) using the first person singular (*I discovered* – *I discover* – *I will discover*) and therefore it does not resolve which tense *discovers* is in (the third person singular). This indicates that at least in Gina, the morphological strategy is not consolidated and that, in fact, she does not speak accurately about the notions of *past*, *present* and *future*.

Recapitulating the 3rd grade pairs, we have seen that the cognitive conflict does not emerge readily because they fail to notice that *discovers* is in the present tense, and once they realise this, they do not have solid enough strategies to resolve the mismatch between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance. Still, we should recognise their ability to manipulate the sentences, even if just on the semantic level (that is, scarcely addressing the formal level).

Course of the conversations in the 6th grade pairs

Regarding the 6th grade pairs, we have already mentioned that most of them realise that the time of the situation does not match the time of the utterance within the first few turns of the conversation. The four most common strategies they use to resolve the mismatch between both times are: world knowledge strategy, semantic strategy, morphological strategy and metalinguistic strategy.

World knowledge strategy

This strategy reveals some 6th grade pairs' ability to activate and relate a body of knowledge in order to resolve the cognitive conflict. Indeed, some pairs mentioned newspaper headlines to refer, albeit vaguely, to a usage of the present tense that does not fit the prototypical usage. In their effort to resolve this dilemma, there were certainly pairs that were able to relate sentences 1 and 2 with other sentences they had seen in other contexts, such as in journalistic language. The example below illustrates this:

Table 7. Allusion by pair 40 to another use of the present tense in other contexts

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 1)
40	28. R: This sentence- is it in the present- the past or the future/ (7 seconds)
(6 th)	29. L: <i>Discovers</i> \
	30. F: Present\
	31. R: It's in the present/
	32. F: Right- a kid is telling about it in the present\
	33. L: Because it might have been written the day it was discovered (6s.) Well- no- because then it wouldn't say "in the 15 th century"- it would say "today"\
	34. F: But in the newspaper- the newspaper- when something like that happens- it says:: they say it like this- they say it like this:: in the newspaper::
	35. R: For instance/ What do you mean/
	36. F: Well- I mean I don't know if it's right::
	37. R: Go ahead- go ahead::
	38. F: Well- newspapers- in their headlines- say something like: "Columbus discovers America"- as if: oh, I don't know::
	39. L: As if it were happening now\
	40. F: Yeah- that's it\ As if it were happening now\ As if someone were writing it now\ As if Columbus had discovered it right now \
	41. R: But this sentence we've just read- do you like it/ (4s.) What do you think, that it's good or bad/
	42. F: It's good\ Yeah- it's good\
	(...)
	54. F: But like if a boy falls- falls somewhere- and it happened a year ago- the newspaper can say <i>he fell</i> : <i>he fell</i> from a cliff- for example- but it can also say <i>falls</i> - <i>he falls</i> from a cliff\
	55. L: Right- the boy falls:: he falls from the edge or something like that\
	56. F: Right- I just don't know how to explain it\

The pair's reasoning in the excerpt above is extremely interesting. They have come upon the dilemma that the time of the situation does not match the time of the utterance, and Francesca (F) tries to resolve

this by asserting that the sentence is being said by a boy in the present (turn 32). This would lead us to believe that she considers the time of the situation and the time of the utterance to be identical, just as in the first comment by her classmate, Lidia (L): "Because it might have been written the day it was discovered" (turn 33). But Lidia then ends the sentence (she waits 6 seconds before she continues) by discarding this option precisely because if the time of the situation matched the time of the utterance there would be no temporal modifier "in the 15th century" (turn 33).

This observation is very important, because it verifies that there is no confusion between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance in the sense that she believes that this temporal modifier does not work if the time of the situation is the same as the time it was uttered. For this reason, Lidia answers that "it would say *today*" (turn 33); that is, she claims that the speaker of the sentence would use a temporal marker that would situate the present on that specific day. However, Francesca goes even further and tries to explain that newspaper headlines use this strategy (turns 34 and 38), and Lidia adds: "as if it were happening now" (turn 39). Francesca cites a more or less realistic example (turn 54) to try to explain that it is common in the media to use the present tense even if the action happened in the past. Therefore, this pair demonstrates that they recognise the retrospective value of the present through their world knowledge (based on their observation of newspaper headlines).

Semantic strategy

The second strategy used to resolve the conflict prompted by the mismatch between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance entails prioritising the time of the situation. This is what some pairs do who choose to anchor the sentence by the temporal modifiers (semantic strategy) at the expense of the morphological anchoring linked to the time of the utterance (initial morphological strategy of 6th grade pairs). The table below exemplifies this with pair 32, for both sentences 1 and 2.

Table 8. Example of pair 32 in the conversations on sentences 1 and 2

Pair	Excerpt
32 (6 th)	14. R: So- when does it happen/
Sentence 1	15. A: In the past\ Right- in the past\
	16. R: Even though the verb is in the present tense/
	17. H and A: Yes\
	18. R: So we agree that this happens::: when/
	19. H: In the past\
	20. R: Why are you so sure/
	21. H: Because the 15 th century is in the past\

Pair	Excerpt
32 (6 th)	9. R: So what verb tense is <i>reaches</i> /
Sentence 2	13. A: Now ((laughing))
	14. R: Wait- hey\ So what is happening/
	15. A: Mankind::: Um::: ((laughing)) if it's not now it's this year\
	16. R: What do you mean/ (4s.) How could we explain it- that/ (7s.) when does it happen: now or in the past/
	17. H: Um::: in the past\ Yes (3s.)\ Yes- because of the year- right\

In the table above, in both sentence 1 (upper part) and sentence 2 (lower part) the students ultimately conclude that the sentences are anchored in the past based on the temporal modifier (turn 21, sentence 1; turn 17, sentence 2). However, what stands out is that in sentence 2, Alex (A) realises the incompatibility and tries to solve it by making the time of the situation match the time of the utterance (turn 15). However, Héctor (H) brings up a new argument about the temporal modifier, which ends up being the key to temporally anchoring the sentence. Yet we should underscore the fact that in both sentence 1 and sentence 2, this pair does not assign a past meaning to the present; rather they simply choose to consider the sentences in the past because of the influence of the temporal modifiers. In fact, this is a rather common dynamic in the pairs, which highlights the difficulty of conceptualising the retrospective usages of the present.

Morphological strategy

The 6th grade pairs also used a third strategy to resolve the incompatibility between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance, which consists of making both times match. We have already mentioned that this resource was also used by the 3rd grade pairs, but in the 6th grade pairs we can note that the pathway leading the two times to converge is based on morphology and not on semantics like with the 3rd grade pairs. This is illustrated with pair 35 (Table 9), who shift the time of the utterance to the time of the situation in sentence 2 as a way of making the information from the verb compatible with the temporal modifiers:

Table 9. 6th grade pair who shifts the time of the utterance to the time of the situation

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 2)
35 (6 th)	1. M: "In 1969- mankind reaches the Moon"
	2. R: When does it happen/
	3. J: In 1969\
	4. M: Now\ Present\ Because if not it would say <i>reached</i> \ Or if not- <i>will reach</i> \
	5. R: Wow::: So- this sentence- is in the present/ What do you think- Jana/
	6. J: It is- but that means that it was written in 1969\

In the table above, Jana (J) answers the researcher's first question by situating the phrase "in 1969" (turn 3), but Montse's (M) answer shifts the sentence to the present, because she conjugates the three basic tenses (she contrasts *reaches* with *reached* and *will reach*, turn 4). Faced with this morphological argument from Montse, the researcher once again solicits Jana's opinion (turn 5) and then this student changes tack and says that her classmate is right (turn 6), expanding the answer with a justification that implies that the time of the utterance matches the time of the situation. Therefore, this pair sees no problem with the fact that the verb is in the present tense and the sentence refers to the past precisely because their reasoning enables them to avoid the dilemma, since they situate the present "in 1969"; that is, they shift the time of the utterance to the time of the situation.

Metalinguistic strategy

Finally, below is an excerpt in which the confluence between both times is resolved. It illustrates how some of the 6th grade pairs manage to overcome the formal constraint that had initially led them to try to match the two times. In the example below, pair 24 ends up concluding that the sentence is in the past because of the influence of the temporal modifier:

Table 10. Example of a 6th grade pair who overcome the convergence of both times

Pair	Excerpt (sentence 2)
24	7. R: But is <i>reaches</i> past!
(6 th)	8. X: "Reaches the Moon"- yes because_
	9. E: No- it depends\
	10. X: Yes- because it is in 1969 and in 1969_
	11. E: Yes in front_
	12. X: It's past \ It's past- in 1969\ And if 1969 is past_
	13. E: If there is a number in front of it_
	14. X: It says that this year_
	15. E: If it's in front_
	16. R: Wait a minute- just a minute- If you're both talking at the same time we'll get nowhere\
	17. X: It says that the reach the Moon <i>that</i> year\
	18. E: If it says a year in front- a month or anything- it's past\ But if now you say "Maria arrives"_
	19. X: Or no- because now imagine that I tell you- "in 2015 they finish that"- That would be the future\
	20. E: Well_
	21. X: Well you said that if there was something in front it was the past\
	22. E: No- <i>reaches</i> - I'm talking about that\ I'm talking about that \

In the excerpt above, Eva (E) tries to explain that the sentence is in the past because of the temporal modifier. In fact, she states that the interpretation of the verb form would be conditioned upon the presence or lack of this marker ("a year, a month or anything", turn 18). The student even cites an example in which the verb could indicate a simultaneous meaning with no temporal modifier ("Maria arrives", turn 18). Xavier (X) joins this strategy and improves on it in the sense that he warns Eva that the existence of a temporal modifier does not necessarily imply the past; rather it can also indicate the future (turn 19). Therefore, in this conversation the students recognise the importance of the circumstantial complements in determining the time of the sentence. What also stands out in this pair is the interaction: both Eva and Xavier are able to reason and try to convince each other using examples and arguments that reveal that there are traces of metalinguistic activity throughout the conversation.

In short, from the conversations of the 6th grade pairs we can see that they employ a variety of strategies, some of which they share with the 3rd grade pairs while others are clearly more elaborate and show more signs that the 6th grade students draw from a wider body of knowledge. Despite the fact that these pairs start heavily influenced by their morphological knowledge, those that overcome it manage to explore the retrospective usage of the present from another perspective thanks to their metalinguistic reflection.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have explored the pairs' knowledge of the retrospective usage of the present tense based on two sentences in which there is a cognitive conflict between the time of the situation (anchored by the temporal modifiers "in the 15th century" and "in 1969") and the time of the utterance (morphologically anchored by *discovers* and *reaches*). To conclude, in this section we shall mention the differences among the answers from the 3rd and 6th grade pairs and answer the research questions.

In the previous section, we noted that mainly the 6th grade pairs discover the conflict; that is, at the beginning of the conversation they discover the incompatibility between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance. In contrast, the majority of 3rd grade pairs do not realise this incompatibility *a priori* because they only focus on the time of the situation in the sense that they temporally anchor the sentences with the information given by the temporal modifiers and do not even notice that the verb forms are in the present tense. In fact, throughout the conversations, many of these 3rd grade pairs never even notice a dilemma; that is, they continue to assert that *discovers* and *reaches* are

in the past tense. In other words, they attach more importance to the temporal modifiers than to the verbs, which corroborates that their formal knowledge is fragile, that the semantic strategy takes precedence over the morphological strategy and that it is apparently difficult for them to consider the verb form separate from the content it expresses.

In contrast, from the very start the 6th grade pairs tend to fixate on the verb morphology, which is precisely why they realise that the time of the situation does not match the time of the utterance. Therefore, they notice cognitive conflict from the outset. And, based on this, we can glean from the conversations that they try to resolve the dilemma by activating different kinds of knowledge. For example, we have seen that they refer to journalistic lingo (Table 7), and they manipulate the sentences to try to resolve the cognitive conflict (Table 10). More than in the 3rd grade pairs, in the 6th grade pairs we have seen that peer dialogue (Mercer, 1997) as well as mediation by the researcher (Camps, 2000) enable them to activate certain levels of metalinguistic activity which helps them to construct knowledge on the retrospective meaning of the present tense.

This, then, leads to several considerations that enable us to revisit and answer the research questions. With regard to the first question (*What knowledge of the retrospective usage of the present tense do students have?*), the results of this study reveal that the students have constructed no knowledge of the retrospective usage of the present tense. We have reached this conclusion after corroborating the two initial hypotheses: first, the univocal identification of the present tense with the simultaneous value, and secondly, the impossibility/difficulty of becoming aware of other usages of this verb tense. It is precisely the teaching activity implemented throughout the study that has enabled us to record the strategies used by the students to discover the retrospective usage of the present tense (thus answering the second question: *What kinds of strategies do they use to discover this usage?*). We have seen that the four strategies used are the morphological, the semantic, world knowledge and the metalinguistic.

With regard to the third question (*How is knowledge of this meaning constructed?*), the construction of knowledge on the retrospective usage of the present tense entails overcoming the cognitive conflict, that is, resolving the incompatibility between the morphological information (recognition of the verb tense) and the semantic information (meaning of the temporal modifiers). The first kind of knowledge is the outcome of school learning, while the second kind is more closely tied to language acquisition processes, in which the semantic phase precedes the morphological phase when defining time. In any event, as already mentioned, the 6th grade pairs' knowledge of the verb paradigm (strictly from a morphological standpoint, not in terms of the usages associated

with it) is the element that triggers the conflict, since these pairs identify *discovers* and *reaches* as present tense verb forms, a kind of reasoning that did not emerge in the 3rd grade pairs. The 6th grade pairs, therefore, prioritise grammatical information over semantic information, probably because they notice the verb form without taking into account the other linguistic elements that also supply time information (Klein, 2009).

Thus, the school strategy, which constructs knowledge of the verb tense primarily based on morphology, seems not to be useful as a tool to resolve the dilemma facing the pairs. In other words, anchoring the time using the morphological strategy prevents the students from discovering the retrospective usage of the present tense. The morphological knowledge that the students have is too closely focused on the verb tense (it does not help them to think about the other usages with which the form might be associated) such that it renders them unable to advance towards the interpretation of the verb time according to the time of the situation, meaning that they must find this information in other temporal markers.

In contrast, using the semantic and world knowledge strategies enables the pairs to explore a temporal anchor that does not match the simultaneity expressed by the prototypical usage of the present tense. Therefore, these strategies can be postulated as a sound point of departure for beginning to construct knowledge of the present tense, yet they are insufficient because even though they are based on usage, they are too loosely tied to the linguistic forms (they are strategies that do not help the students to understand that the usages they explore are expressed with the same tense form). Thus, regarding the final question (*What is the relationship between usage and reflective knowledge of this meaning?*), the study highlights the fact that this relationship is not direct and shows precisely that interaction helps to connect grammatical knowledge and language usage. Indeed, we have seen that metalinguistic activity emerges from some of the conversations, which contributes to integrating the form (present verb tense) with other usages beyond the prototypical one (specifically, the retrospective usage).

Classroom implications

The above conclusions lead us to posit several classroom implications, the outcome of the two major reflections gleaned from this study, namely:

- Certain deeply rooted conceptions of school practice actually serve as an obstacle for advancing towards constructing grammatical knowledge, while the intuitive mastery of certain language forms (the result of world or experiential knowledge) have come to the fore as a strategy that could be used as a point of departure in this process.

- Students do not associate grammar knowledge with language usage, but the metalinguistic activity prompted by the interactions may contribute to integrating these two kinds of knowledge.

Camps (2009) notes that the grammar teaching-learning process has to overcome three kinds of pitfalls: epistemological, psychogenetic and methodological. Applied to the subject being studied in this research, the epistemological pitfall is related to the complexity of the notion of the present as a multifunctional form, just as most linguistic forms are, with the additional consideration that basic school knowledge has not equipped the students to grasp this complexity. With regard to the methodological pitfalls, we have validated that conversation avoids the roteness of school procedures and promotes student reflection, which is needed to deal with the complexity entailed in understanding the retrospective usage of the present tense. And in terms of the psychogenetic pitfalls, we verified that students' ability to take the language as an object of observation and analysis seems to increase as they advance in their schooling. Thus, the 6th grade students are better prepared to reflect on language than their 3rd grade counterparts.

Based on these reflections, we would like to present several classroom implications from a twofold perspective: contents and methodology. Regarding contents, the results point to the fact that we should reconsider both the grammatical contents and the sequencing of these contents in relation to the teaching-learning of verbs and verb tenses. Schools prepare students to resolve certain grammar problems (linked to verb forms), but conflict arises when different problems are assigned related to the actual usage of the verbs, not just their tense forms (such as in this study). In this case, school strategies fail to help students solve the problems. What is more, we have also seen that not only does the school strategy not work; it can even become an obstacle to making headway in students' construction of knowledge about the present tense.

Based on the two hypotheses, what is underscored is that an excessively simplistic classroom transposition associates the present tense solely with the simultaneous value and that this simplification hinders the possibility of expanding the range of usages of the present tense. In this sense, we suggest an interdisciplinary approach to teaching-learning the verb tenses, since it seems that students could make sense of the integration between tense form and usage in other curricular areas that deal with the notion of time (such as the sciences, the social sciences and cultural studies). This effort should go beyond the notional approach (verb, tense form) and veer instead towards discourse grammar (Charolles and Combettes, 2001), guiding the construction of the concept of *time* by taking other areas (and other tools) into account that would contribute to students' gaining an understanding of this notion and how it is represented via

discourse (Bruner, 1996; Mercer, 1997). Starting with this premise would enable the time relationships in the texts to be addressed from a holistic perspective, one that is less attached to the verb forms per se. That is, it would entail envisioning grammar teaching-learning as linked to its usage in discourse.

In this sense, we would advocate a pedagogical grammar that enables students to construct more elaborate grammatical knowledge under the paradigm of cognitive linguistics. The prototype theory (Langacker, 1987; Cuenca and Hilferty, 1999) offers a comprehensive model on how language works that includes both linguistic forms and their usages. The research has demonstrated that the formal paradigm does not help students to understand the different usages of verbs; rather both the time information provided by other linguistic elements (Klein, 2009) and the learner's other knowledge (such as world knowledge, Tartas, 2009) must also be brought into play. Therefore, this points to the need to include student's knowledge in what is being constructed throughout their schooling and to prevent both kinds of knowledge from hindering and contradicting each other. As Nadeau and Fisher (2006) note, "l'apprentissage constitue ainsi une transformation des représentations initiales et successives des apprenants" (p. 55). The goal is to prevent the transposition of grammatical contents from being reduced to a simplification of these contents that hinders the gradual construction of knowledge about these concepts.

According to this pedagogical grammar, we also note the need to revise the teaching methodology in order to encourage learning that is supported by the relationship between knowledge and usage. This new approach should bear in mind the students' metalinguistic reasoning ability and the real possibility of implementing this kind of activity in the classroom -- both requisites for integrating these two sources of knowledge and moving towards the construction of an elaborate linguistic system. Metalinguistic activity is certainly of prime importance in the construction of language knowledge (Fontich, 2010; Rodríguez Gonzalo, 2011); therefore, thinking about language should be a more frequent cognitive operation in the classroom. In this sense, this study on the recognition and understanding of the retrospective usage of the present tense has shown that the metalinguistic activity generated through interaction contributes to a better understanding of the connection between linguistic forms and usages.

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