

Applying cognitive grammar to the Count/Mass Distinction

An exploratory case study with pre-service
teachers

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This exploratory case study contributes to the ongoing “methodological consolidation” in Applied Cognitive Linguistics (Wirag et al. 2022). It does so by examining the relationship between pre-service English language teachers’ attitudes toward grammar teaching and their acceptance of an innovative pedagogical approach to the Count/Mass Distinction (CMD) inspired by Cognitive Grammar (CG). Eleven first-year college students at a teacher-training University College in Belgium participated in the study. A questionnaire was used to determine the participants’ beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching. Elements of a CG approach to the CMD were integrated into a lesson plan and presented to the participants. The participants were then divided into two random focus groups. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, and a thematic analysis was performed on the transcripts. The data suggests that the participants’ prior knowledge and experience, the ecological validity of the innovation, and their perceived capacity to integrate the resource into their practice, all affect their assessment of a CG-informed innovation, with the latter being the most likely to impede application. The study sheds light on how pre-service teachers’ beliefs impact the adoption of innovative pedagogical methods for teaching grammar and suggests ways to make CG more accessible to practitioners.

Keywords: pedagogical innovation, teacher beliefs, pedagogical grammar, research-teaching interface, Cognitive Grammar