



**مجلة كلية التربية للبنات**  
**مجلة فصلية علمية محكمة في العلوم الانسانية والاجتماعية تصدرها كلية التربية للبنات-**  
**جامعة بغداد-العراق**  
**Journal of the College of Education for Women**  
A Refereed Scientific Quarterly Journal for Human and Social Sciences Issued by the College of Education for Women-University of Baghdad-IRAQ

Received: January 22, 2023  
تاريخ الإستلام: ٢٠٢٣/١/٢٢

Accepted: March 1, 2023  
تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٣/٣/١

Published: March 29, 2023  
تاريخ النشر الإلكتروني: ٢٠٢٣/٣/٢٩

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v34i1.1653>



## A Cognitive Linguistic Study of the Present Simple: An Experimental Study in the University of Baghdad

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### Abstract

Some research reports that cognitive grammar (CG) theory has good contributions to teaching English as a foreign language. In this research, the researchers seek to apply this theory and its principles when teaching the simple present tense to Iraqi students who face difficulties in differentiating between the multiple usages of this tense. To achieve this objective, the researchers have conducted an experimental study on a group of 60 Iraqi students in the University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women. Langacker's (2003) theory has been adopted in the analysis of the cognitive relations to understand the common and different connections of these usages of the simple present. The study has concluded that the cognitive grammar theory contributed to improving the participants' capacity in comprehending, using the present simple, and in correcting the grammatical errors that they used to commit. Moreover, the theory helped the participants to differentiate between the simple differences of English tenses when they overlap.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, cognitive grammar, Iraqi students, present simple

## دراسة لغوية ادراكية للمضارع البسيط: دراسة تجريبية في جامعة بغداد

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### المستخلص

تشير بعض الأبحاث إلى أن نظرية القواعد المعرفية (CG) لها مساهمات جيدة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية؛ لذا تسعى الباحثات في هذا البحث إلى تطبيق هذه النظرية ومبادئها عند تدريس صيغة المضارع البسيط للطلاب العراقيين الذين يواجهون صعوبة في التمييز بين الاستعمالات المتعددة لهذه الصيغة. من أجل ذلك أجرت الباحثات دراسة تجريبية على مجموعة من ٦٠ طالبة عراقية في جامعة بغداد، كلية التربية للبنات. واعتمدت الباحثات على نظرية Langacker (٢٠٠٣) في تحليل العلاقات المعرفية وفهم الروابط المشتركة والمختلفة لاستعمالات صيغة المضارع البسيط. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن نظرية القواعد المعرفية قد أسهمت في تحسين قدرة المشاركين على فهم واستعمال الحاضر البسيط وتصحيح الأخطاء النحوية التي كانوا يرتكبونها. علاوة على ذلك، فإن النظرية لديها القدرة على التمييز بين الاختلافات البسيطة في الأزمنة الإنجليزية عندما تتداخل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الطلاب العراقيون، علم اللغة الإدراكي/ المعرفي، القواعد المعرفية، المضارع البسيط



## 1. Introduction

Since grammar is one of the basic components of language, learners generally need to master this important part to avoid making mistakes. Thus, it is essential to adopt an accurate linguistic pattern that corresponds to the rules because the function of grammar is to obtain a meaningful sentence by regulating the order of words (Alonso, Cadierno, & Jarvis, 2016). Grammar is a "sentence-making machine" because through good grammar mastery, the learner can arrange these vocabularies into useful, good and meaningful sentences (Thornbury, 2002). Further, Ur (2006) said, if one knows when, where and how to put these words, s/he will be able to use them and vice versa. Larsen-Freeman (2015) argued that with a major focus on the affective analysis of structure, teachers still view grammar as merely a set of rules. Therefore, it is necessary to suggest an important grammatical perspective to compensate for this shortcoming, such as cognitive rules.

Speaking of simple present tense, it has many similar uses and is one of the most frequently used tenses in the English language. It is used mainly in everyday conversations, direct communications, comments on direct events or demonstrations, special exclamations (with initial adverbs), performances, or in fictions. It can refer to the present in three different cases, such as: the usual present, the immediate present and the future case (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik 1985). Few Iraqi learners mastered these multiple uses, including the basic and special uses even though the present simple is taught to EFL students at the beginning of their educational journey. An important part of this problem is because of the way tenses are represented and taught in English. Though textbooks on teaching the Grammar of English as a Foreign Language are available, students get lists of the uses of the tenses and examples that illustrate these uses. Besides, the relationships between the use and the motives that lead to them are absent. That is why, learners fail to use

the rules they memorized. Moreover, they apply the rules of their first language when studying the grammatical patterns of the target language (Austen, 2017).

Iraqi learners study English tenses using methods that depend on memorization. Through the school curricula, they learn the simple present tense form, its conditions in affirmation, negation, and question, and the situations in which it occurs. These curricula lack the adaptation of modern or effective cognitive grammar approaches that have proved their effectiveness. Due to the lack of semantic and conceptual bases when learning the present simple, students are observed committing errors when using it. Furthermore, it is important to note that students in the pre-university stages strive to obtain high marks regardless of the scientific inventory of each subject. That is, in English classes, there is no attempt to really and practically understand the language and its grammar because students are more concerned with getting high marks. These motives encouraged the investigator to select this group of participants.

Accordingly, cognitive grammar approach is believed to affect EFL Iraq learners' performance when using the simple present tense. Accordingly, the study aims to state **the extent to which CG enhances students' competence about the tenses of English**. That is, the research question that the study intends to answer is: **to what extent CG enhances students' competence about the tenses of English?**

This study is important because it analyzes the simple present tense via the theory of cognitive grammar and its concepts. This study also tests the appropriateness of this theory when teaching the simple present tense to the Iraqi EFL learners. Moreover, this research could encourage more researchers to conduct more studies about English tenses adopting the CG approach.



## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Cognitive Grammar

Cognitive grammar is considered a radical alternative to formal theories. During the past half-century, formal theories have dominated the linguistic theory. The conceptual semantics entails that cognitive grammar is based on human experiences, the ability of humans to interpret situations in alternative ways, and on the processes of imagination and mental constructions. Conceptual semantics is an alternative to objectivist semantics, which was based on the conditions of fact or logical conclusions. According to conceptual semantics, it is possible to compute grammatical rules; a matter which is considered to be inherently meaningful (rather than being a separate formal system). In other words, following the cognitive linguistic approach, grammar forms a continuum with the lexicon, and is found in groups of symbolic structures, that is, pairs of conceptual structures and symbolized phonetic structures. Thus, all grammatical elements have meaning. The foremost issues that the theory of cognitive grammar must address include the grammatical classes, structures, the relationship between grammar and vocabulary, capturing regularity, and imposing appropriate constraints. It further elucidates how the framework applies to the central domains of language structure: deixis, nominative structure, clausal structure, and complex sentences. Consideration is also given to discourse, the temporal dimension of grammar, and to the cognitive processes and the construction of the mental world (Langacker, 2008).

What makes up grammar according to epistemological norms are the units that represent pairs of typical meanings, such as words, phrases, and grammatical structures, which have a symbolic or structural conception of language (Bybee, 2010). Dissimilarities between grammar and vocabulary in cognitive grammar have not been detected. This is because, as Evans (2019) stated, language is a system of "words and rules" according to formal models

and its normative point of view. It consists of a grammatical component that contains rules operating on the lexical units, lexicon, and other components that govern the sound and meaning of a sentence.

Making up the rules in cognitive grammar is a result of the use of language; that is, language use stimulates the derivation of the units. Abstraction and planning are two major processes in cognitive grammar. The first process, abstraction, involves the construction, which appears as an outcome of the generalization of forms via cases of language usage. For instance, due to the recurrent usage of sentences, phrases, and words that are repetitive in talking laterally with the variety of senses related to these units, learners of English acquire new vocabularies. The second process, schemas, is a distinct type of construct. Schemas can give real statements that are more general than the schemas that constitute them. This can be ascertained by investigating and conserving the mutual items and excluding the dissimilar ones among the real constructions. The subsequent instances display a difference in meaning due to the use of the preposition on:

1. There is a ball **on the table**.
2. There is a bird **on the tree**.
3. **On Monday**, the school starts.

Looking at these examples, one can find that they show slightly different meanings although they contain the same lexical elements. The first and second examples are similar because they give the same meaning that the first unit is above the second unit. However, the third example sets a time and gives a completely different meaning. These senses ascend from both the contextual and mental notion of the preposition 'on'. The diversity and difference in meaning in the three examples achieve a schema for the preposition "on". The development of grammar as the structure of linguistic acquaintance is a result of language usage (Evans & Green, 2006).



Language contains definite lexicon, multi-word units, and schematic grammatical elements because there are different forms of interpretation that emerge from language according to the view of cognitive grammar (Drożdż, 2018). This view can help learners better up their writing skills (Asadi & Al-issa, 2022). Focusing, prominence, specificity, and perspective are four elements of interpretation. With respect to focusing, passive voice is used to emphasize the specific part of the sentence. For example:

**4. A tree was cut down.**

Prominence expresses the extent to which one thing refers to another. The profile, *the boy*, and the trajectory or the landmark, *his kite*, are two important concepts in cognitive grammar. For example:

**5. The boy flies his kite.**

As for specificity, it is the transition from general to specific and to very specific. For example:

**6. The House, the White House, the American White House.**

Perspective, on the other hand, is the order of presenting the expression. In other words, the default display order is when the utterer and listener are in the same place discussing the scenes around them. For instance:

**7. We will be visiting Manny tonight** (Bennett, 2014).

In recent years, the attempt to apply cognitive grammar (CG) in teaching foreign languages has become an important topic of debate and dialogue among linguists. The interest in such an approach has been accentuated, as it concentrates on teaching language in a meaningful unrestrained background. Further, its main interest is to describe the use of motivation and language rather than the structure and its abstract rules. That is why, CG appears to be

normal and appropriate in language teaching (Andreou, & Ianthi, 2017). According to Tyler (2012), it is important to learn language following CG perspective that relies on the contextual use and the expression of meaning. This is because contextual meaning has a major role in defining the shape of linguistic structures and clarifying what one intends to interconnect and provokes the way speech is formulated. Thus, teaching English through language grammar can be of probable profit to the method of teaching grammar in EFL classrooms (Ajami, 2019). In this regard, Tyler (2012) added that what helps students get greater comprehension and perception into how they introduce themselves is to focus on the meaning of rules rather than on the way these rules are formed.

**2.2 Present Simple Analysis in the Light of Cognitive Linguistics**

Since simple present does not necessarily indicate that the process being described is taking place at the time of speaking, this tense is not present tense as is generally agreed upon. Further, students cannot use this tense to talk about actions that happen at the time of speaking. Besides, using simple present tense to describe finite actual events that occur at the same time, as in the example (8) is not consistently useful:

**8. Nader (eats/ plays football/ watches TV) at the moment.**

**9. Nader (is eating/ is playing football/ is watching TV) at the moment.**

The simple present does not seem to indicate an event at the time of speaking in its many uses. However, there are references to the future, the past, eternal situations, or even eternal truths in its standard uses, as in the following examples:

**10. My passport expires in 24/12/2022.** (Future Reference)

**11. While I am walking this morning, I meet John. We talk for a while. Then, the bus comes, and he goes.** (Historic Present)





12. **The train moves to its next station.**  
(Direction)
13. **This man was born with a golden spoon in his mouth.** (Generic)
14. **My friends and I play football every Saturday evening.** (Habitual)
15. **It rains in winter, and it is hot in summer.**  
(Eternal Truth)

The current English language characterizes the occurrence of a complete instantiation of the processes identified in the previous examples and coincides precisely with the speaking time. The occurrence exists in the world as stipulated by customary norms. The speaker must put in his perception the occurrence of a process when describing its occurrence, and his mind works through a continuous series of processes to link the specific relationships distributed over an imagined period of time (Langacker, 2003). The process is present in the speaker's perception activity. The mind-scanning contributes to highlighting it through the foundational stages of the process and works to its conceptual occurrence. Without being determined by the direct remark of the procedure taking place there, the speaker can perform these processes independently. Certain uses of the present simple are precisely what the occurrence of a process can be considered as an independent conceptual occurrence. It is only in the mental activity of the thinker, and is not related to external developments.

For actual operations that occur at the time of speaking, the canonical usage of this tense is an apt description for them. In this canonical situation, usually in the present simple, the perfect cannot be used, while the imperfective can be used. The normal non-existence of present simple perfective aspect is illustrated in this systematic exceptional analysis, i.e. 'performative', as in the examples (16, 17, & 18):

16. **I promise to help you.**
17. **I beg your pardon, could you register me?**

18. **I hereby sentence you to help your wife for two months.**

Long-term and cognitive issues are not issues with the simple present *per se* as the indications for use suggest. These problems stem from certain viewing conditions, which are the default viewing order. The event to be described is outside of the speaker's control and is considered independent. In the default arrangement, the speaker only detects the event and then inform it. The utterer cannot start his explanation concurrent with its beginning in this case, nor is its period likely to coincide with the time required to utter a specific sentence. Being intentional actions that carry out the same actions labeled; performatives circumvent these issues by their very nature.

Using the present simple for successive actions is normal and problem-free. Observing preparations logically evade long-term and cognitive issues. Imagining a situation in which the utterer dominates both the duration and the occurrence of the described event is simply what is needed, so the description can accord with the time of the event. For instance:

19. **Children play with car toys; and a play village**

Here, each act is accompanied by a descriptive sentence. The consecutive words in example (20) concurs with the repeated actions of moving a toy car from one place to another.

20. **Now, I eat breakfast. Now, I call my friend. Now, I watch T.V.**

Generally, the present simple is used naturally in "narrating successive events". Imagine a dialogue about Corona, as in example (21), where each paragraph accompanies the action it describes. The participants shared their experience in taking preventive measures:

21. **I use a mask. I take the vaccine. I stay at home.**

To avoid long-term and cognitive problems, speakers through presentations have



sufficient control over events. The utterer can control both the incidence and the length of the described incident, so the speaker is able to make the description and the occurrence coincidence.

The correctness of the canonical usage of the English simple present tense has very strong shreds of evidence through performatives, demonstrations, and imperfectives. These shreds of evidence prove that at the time of speaking, the actual processes occurred. Otherwise, there are many usages of the English present simple that are used, but not at the time of speaking as in the examples from (10 -15). These actual events are not directly expressed by these expressions as in the examples of (10 -15). Langacker (2003) found out the 'special' uses to clarify the canonical uses already indicated by presenting the simple present tense in the English language in a distinct presentation quite different from the canonical presentation. According to Langacker (2003), in the canonical presentation, one can touch the objectivity of the observer, who describes events and situations impartially and interprets them with complete objectivity.

Specifically, the synchronous arrangements of actions are not involved in the presentation of processes. The events in question are visualized further theoretically as entries in a list, and jointly they constitute a type of a scenario to be followed as Langacker suggested. They will be unevenly the same as stage directions in this respect just as in the example (11). In fact, present simple verbs are not used in immediate description of authentic actions, but they refer to reading entries in some kind of a list or scenario. In short, what is linguistically encoded is the "virtual" occurrence of events. The virtual event is part of a non-canonical order, but it is not the "actual" occurrence of events. The virtual occurrence does accord with the time of speaking according to the viewing arrangement. A clear example of this case can be seen in scheduling future, as in 22:

**22. My father reaches tomorrow evening from Italy.**

Expressions like (22) and the like are indirectly related to the actual event only. Sentences of this kind do not directly describe the real incident in particular, but rather a "representation" of that event on some sort of "virtual schedule". Sentences of this type function to illustrate a type of projection or a plan regarding the expected events in the future in terms of occurrence and timing. Figuratively, one can think of a virtual table, as a "document" that is accessible to be "read" at any time. When making a sentence like (22), basically, the utterer reads one of its entries. The input evolves to the "virtual" happening of the incident it contains. The (virtual) repetition of the selected process precisely coincides with the speaking time, since this incident is determined by the sentence reader.

Forms such as the example (22) are, according to Langacker (2003) typical of the so-called "non-present" uses of the present simple in English. A number of which are figuratively described as reading a hypothetical document although the details vary. The differences lie in the type of the document predicted. In the case of (21), the document will be an imaginary text of how the use of coronavirus prevention measures will continue to be shown. The text may be embodied physically as in the case of directions in example (12). For the "historical present" in (11), there is a sequential set of recallable actions the speaker can rationally "remember" at rest, at the speed required for a linguistic encoding.

Recognizing the particular viewing arrangements that are assumed a priority is the key to understand the "non-present" uses of the simple present in general. The uses differ from the virtual preparation by raising a type of a "mental construction" due to several factors, such as: schedule, text, or mental remodeling. These factors contribute to the drawing and representation of events cognitively. Moreover, when these events are parallel in some way to real action, the events characterized via mental planning are linguistically and immediately encoded events. Thus, they are represented by using the simple present tense. Indeed, according



to the hypothetical viewing order, as a special case of this more general scheme, one can look to characterize the actual events. This is determined by the state of uniqueness among the intellectual structures of the actions represented and the remark of the real events (Langacker, 2003).

To sum up, the simple present tense is used: First, to speak in general about events or to describe people, things, animals, or events; second, for events that happen frequently, all the time or are generally true; third, to speak directly. This tense is used with some verbs that are only used in the simple present tense (Murphy, 2019).

### 2.3 Previous Studies

The cognitive grammar theory has an important impact on linguistic pedagogy. Many of the research papers conducted adopted this theory to address the problems of prepositions for Iraqi students as EFL learners. This theory has spatial relations and lexical fields which play an important role in increasing vocabularies.

Aajami (2022) conducted a study about teaching English progressive tense via adopting the cognitive grammar theory and its principles. This study was conducted because Iraqi learners cannot understand some issues related to the usage of tenses in English. Accordingly, an empirical study was conducted on 85 participants. To obtain the quantitative and qualitative data, pretest and post tests were set, in addition to conducting focused group discussion sessions. The results showed a significant improvement in the level of students when dealing with the tenses in English. It also showed an effective contribution of the theory in expanding and refining the participants' comprehension of the English language tenses.

Depending on the grammatical rules, Kermer (2020) conducted a study to produce an effective model that helps examine language acquisition. The aim of the study was to use the developed concepts and identify their benefits within the framework of CG and CL to study the multilingual impact. Through interpretation, the

possible contribution of CL to SLA was clarified. The analysis of the effects of interpreting and perceiving the events that a person performs was the result of the concepts developed based on the cognitive theory and its tools in event analysis. The results showed that in the learners' expression and interpretation of temporal relationships in the language learning process, there was an emergence of a new perspective due to the effects of CL. This perspective was due to adopting a cognitive outline to explain and analyze aspects of theoretical allocation. The results also showed that language learners depend on their language, i.e., the patterns of the concepts established in their mother tongue.

Many researchers in Iraq seek to develop the teaching of the English language, Al-Baharani and Al-Robuye are among them. In (2016), they conducted distinguished research on understanding the multiple meanings of the preposition at. There were two main objectives of this research. The first was to understand the semantic scheme of the preposition at; The second was to examine how Iraqi learners treat the semantic domains of the preposition at. The researchers relied on both types of quantitative and qualitative data, and the Domain Highlighting analysis model by William Croft (1993) was used. The results showed the possibility of applying cognitive theory to many studies related to language in the Iraqi context. The knowledge diagram also contributes effectively to helping Iraqi learners understand the semantic domains of prepositions.

In China, Tian (2015) researched the functioning of the cognitive framework in instructing English tenses, especially the present simple tense. The researchers relied on two groups of participants, one of them was subjected to an experiment. The researchers made a comprehensive review of the simple present tense in the English language and relied on CL model in the analysis. Then, the multiple practices of the present simple tense were emphasized. Later, the method of analysis using cognitive bases was compared with the



traditional method of teaching in Chinese schools. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the control and experimental groups in both the grammatical rule and error correction. However, it was found that in the task of filling in the blank, the cognitive rules contributed to improving students' performance.

Bielak and Pawlak (2011) researched teaching English tense and aspect with the assistance of a cognitive grammar framework. This research aimed to compare traditional accounts with cognitive grammar. Clarification was made to the cognitive rules, and the traditional methods when dealing with the uses of the present simple and the present perfect; in addition to the situations presented with each of these two tenses at the time of speaking. In the experiment, the researchers relied on fifty students divided into three groups. The outcomes displayed that the cognitive bases have effective contributions significantly through the promotion of explicit grammatical knowledge. It also showed that the cognitive bases are more effective than the traditional descriptions when dealing with English tenses.

In the current research, the researchers will adopt Langacker (2003) analysis to check the efficiency of the CG theory in studying the meanings and theoretical basis of the simple present tense of English as a foreign language among Iraqi students. This study is distinguished from previous studies in that it links the meanings to the usage, in other words, the learners evoke the meanings of sentences in the present simple before using them. This study tries to assist learner to imagine the meaning of a sentence before using. Therefore, it can expand learners' 'ability to write correct expressions and control mistakes.

#### **2.4 The Adopted Theory**

Cognitive grammar has become an alternative with some advantages that contribute to the improvement of EFL teaching because it possesses a more comprehensive descriptive model of the language (Aajami,2020). Tyler

(2012) suggested that CG can demonstrate well the "systematic regularity and connectivity in the language" through its grammatical representation that focuses on the meaning. Therefore, when learners are able to discover its inherent meaning, memorizing grammar rules is less necessary. More than that, because it relies on the way humans perceive the world in reality and translate it into the use of language, CG presents an authentic, purposeful and clear picture of grammar (Langacker, 2008). Since the cognitive grammar is a radical alternative for the formalist theories and depend on the human experience in the use of language, it has its conceptual implications in interpreting situations based on building imagination and mental construction. Thus, sentences can be understood by the significance of their meanings rather than by being subject to a grammatical system. This theory depends on vocabulary and its grammatical characteristics, and the relationship between grammar and vocabulary. It further takes into account the time dimension of grammar (Langacker, 2008).

### **3. Analytical Part**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

The research is experimental and relies on both qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting data. The participants selected to be the sample of the study are 60 female learners. To meet the objective of the study, which is to help Iraqi learners differentiate between the multi-usages of the present simple, the researchers are to fulfill the following steps:

- Preparing lists of the multiple uses of the simple present tense, shedding light on its basic, negative and question structures.
- designing a plan of 16 sessions to review and discuss the English simple present tense. These sessions have been divided into eight weeks; each week involves two sessions for a period of eight weeks, two lectures per each week. The first week involves working on the introduction, reviewing and discussing previous information. The second week explains the theory of the cognitive rules and





its principles in addition to conducting the pre-test. The third week includes working on explaining the mental diagrams of the semantic meaning of some sentences in the present simple tense. From the fourth week till the seventh week, practical applications and discussions about the simple present in the light of the cognitive theory and its principles have been made. The last week includes a post-test, the questionnaire, and focus group discussion sessions on the experience. That is, the tests have been conducted during April and May, and the whole experiment has lasted for sixteen sessions, two sessions per week. The stages of the experiment are stated as follows:

- ❖ **Introductory Stage:** In this stage, the investigator explains the motives behind selecting the topic, the problem and the theory used to treat the problem. The researchers explain here the cognitive grammar theory, its principles and its importance in the study of the English language tenses. They also present an overview of the founder of the theory.
- **The First Stage:** The investigators set a pre-test in this stage to identify the participants' capacity using the present simple. They also seek to measure the participants' ability to distinguish between the uses of the simple present tense and its interferences with other tenses of English.
- **The Second Stage:** This stage is the backbone of the experiment. The researchers with participants go in-depth at the core of the experiment by identifying the use of the present simple tense and how to master the use of its cases in the light of the theory of cognitive grammar. Participants begin to know the basic cognitive knowledge in the human brain of grammar. The participants' realization that the mental or cognitive perception of events before, during, or after their occurrence is what contributes to motivating the speaker to choose the best tense to describe them.
- **The Last Stage:** It is conducted after the completion of the experiment. At this stage,

the researchers conduct the post questionnaire, as well as the posttest and focused group discussion in order to obtain the necessary data.

- Selecting (60) first year students at the College of Education for Women in the University of Baghdad. The sample has been chosen purposefully focusing on the point that they learned English language in a traditional way depending on memorization, especially with regard to English tenses.
- Collecting the qualitative and quantitative data from the participants through the four sessions of focused group discussion, the two pre and post-tests, and from the questionnaire before applying the experiment, and another after its implementation.

### 3.2 Participants

The number of participants is 60 female students from the first year of the College of Education for Women- University of Baghdad. The demographic information of the participants has been recorded. The necessary information related to the simple present tense was explained to the participants and discussed with them in light of their previous information that they obtained during their study journey. All participants are women and their ages range between 17 and 19 years old. Most of them spent 10 years learning English as a foreign language, starting at the elementary level. The motivation for learning English is that it is the foreign language imposed in the curricula set by the Ministry of Education. The series of books they studied, which represented the English language curriculum, are the curricula that are being used by the Ministry of Education in Iraq. All the participants know the simple present tense in English and think they master it; they also think that they can use it correctly.

### 3.3 Limitations of the Study

This research is restricted only to (60) participants participating in this study from first-year students at the Department of English Language/College of Education for Women/University of Baghdad/Iraq. This study



has been conducted during the academic year 2022-2021.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Through the two separate tests, a pre-test and a post test, quantitative data have been collected. The initial test has been conducted on the second week of the experiment. The post-test has been conducted in the last week after the completion of the experiment. Similar set of question forms has been used in the two tests. There is a group of sentences that require deep analysis and a set of pictures to describe and to determine their meanings by the participants. Participants must also draw a mental and

timeline diagram of the sentences and pictures. 60 scores have been achieved in both tests, and the results have then been analyzed using the SPSS statistical editor. The results have shown a progress of more than (0.5).

#### 3.4.1 T-Test

To meet the objective of the study, **examining the extent to which CG enhances students' competence about the tenses of English**, the researchers conducted the tests as explained in the procedures, statistically processed the results, and then tabulated the SPSS analysis of the pretest and posttest marks, as shown in the Tables 1, 2 and 3:

**Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	14.9500	60	4.16091	.93041
	Posttest	16.3500	60	4.30758	.96320

**Table 2. Paired Samples Correlations**

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	pretest & posttest	60	.312	.180

**Table 3. Paired Samples Test**

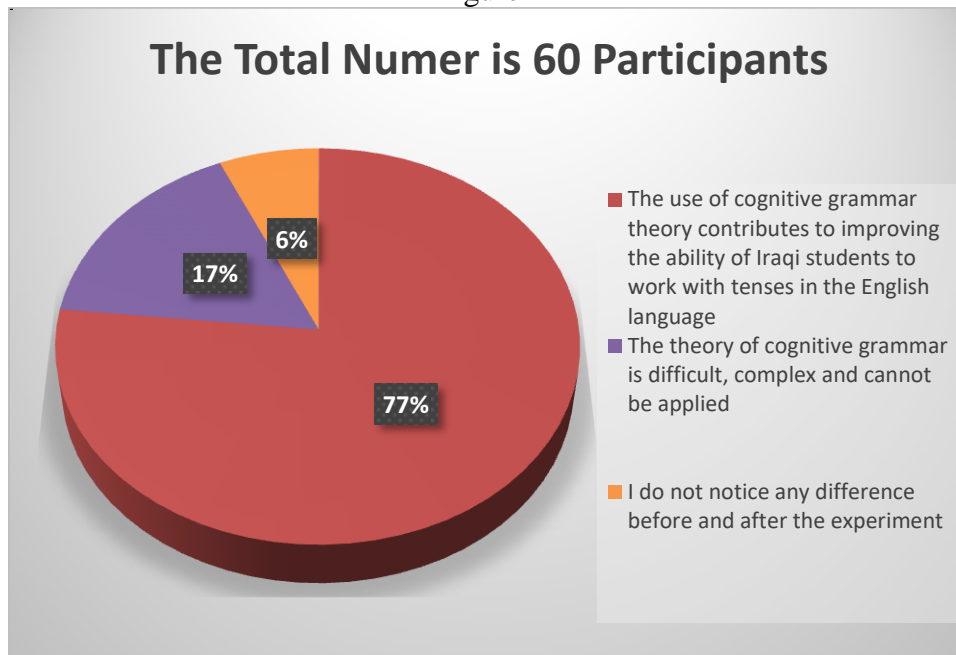
		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean	Error95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	pretest posttest	-1.40000	4.96726	1.11071	-3.72475	.92475	-1.260	59	.223

The results have shown that the difference in the pre and post-tests is (1.4) mark, which is greater than (0.05). The results have indicated a significant improvement in the participants' level in handling the simple present tense. Participants have been able to provide an accurate analysis and description of the present simple usages as well as to draw mental and time diagrams. These diagrams are illustrative diagrams of the meanings of the sentences. The difference

between the two tests is important; consider Figure 1:



Figure 1



*The results of the participants' opinions on the GC theory*

### 3.4.2 Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire are reliable and accord with the outcomes of the quantitative data. The survey displays that 77%, or 46 participants out of 60, believe that the use of the cognitive theory is useful for Iraqi students when dealing with tenses in the English language. 17% or 10 of the participants out of 60 believe that the theory is complex and difficult to apply on the English language classes of Iraqi learners. Besides, 6% or 4 of the participants out of 60 believe that there is no difference at the beginning and end of the experiment. They believe that the cognitive grammar theory is of low value in dealing with English tenses.

### 3.4.3 Focus Group Discussion

After analyzing the qualitative data collected through focused discussion sessions held in four groups; 15 participants each, it has been found that the results of the qualitative data are close to the results of the quantitative data. The responses, opinions, and ideas of the participants varied: the bulk of the participants are positive about adopting the theory of cognitive grammar when dealing with the English language tenses, particularly the present

simple tense. This section of the participants believes that the principles of the theory effectively contribute to helping them to draw mental diagrams for the semantics of the presented sentences in the present simple. These schemes have a positive effect in removing ambiguity and differentiating between the uses of present simple when overlapping with other tenses. They also say that this experience is useful to them, gives them the opportunity, and enables them to use mental schemas and delve deep into the meanings.

A small part of the participants believe that the application of the CG theory is problematic and complex and may contribute to the complexity of the educational process for the Iraqi students as foreign learners of English. They justify their choice that the theory touches purely mental aspects, and they see it as being far from education and approaching other scientific fields. The smallest part of the participants does not see that there is an impact on the application of this theory or not. They justify their choice that foreign learners are able to make the best uses of grammar by studying them, even if they encounter some difficulty and ambiguity.



### 3.4.4 Findings and Results

This study has an important set of results: First, the cognitive grammar theory is important and necessary in teaching Iraqi students as EFL learners. Second, the theory and its principles have an effective contribution to explaining and clarifying the simple present tense and the intellectual schemes of the meaning of the sentences. Third, the theory has an effective contribution to expanding the Iraqi students' understanding of the expected meanings of the sentences. Fourth, the contributors are able to distinguish between the cognitive linguistic methodology in treating English present simple and the methods through which they learned the English tenses. Fifth, the way the participants learn is fairly good, but learning following the cognitive grammar theory method increases the participants' ability to understand and comprehend the nuances of tenses as they overlap.

### 4. Conclusions

To answer the research question represented by “**to what extent CG enhances students' competence about the tenses of English?**”, the researchers have concluded the following:

- a. To determine the form of the grammatical structures, it is necessary to understand the meaning to be communicated. Cognitive grammar operates on the principle of using language that creates grammar and motivates users to formulate appropriate speech for the situation.
- b. Cognitive grammar has the ability to enable Iraqi students to learn English according to its principles.
- c. Iraqi students can improve their performance effectively and significantly. Throughout this study, the researchers have studied the participants' knowledge about the English present simple tense in the light of the cognitive grammar theory and its principles. This approach enables the participants to link meanings to mental schemas and their realistic significance.

- d. Majorly, there is a noticeable improvement in the participants' performance regarding mastering the use of the simple present tense and its multiple cases.

### 5. Recommendations

There are some recommendations that the researchers believe are important and may assist to improve the teaching and learning processes to Iraqi EFL learners. The theory of cognitive grammar is an important addition and its application on the Iraqi curricula contributes to enhancing the ability of Iraqi learners and mitigating the obstacles they face during their educational journey. The theory also helps in building learners' mental and performance capabilities. The results of this study encourage further studies in this field.

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