

Tore Nessel (2008):

***Abstract Phonology in a Concrete Model. Cognitive Linguistics and the Morphology-Phonology Interface*, Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 250 pp.**

This book, which is equally relevant for phonologists, morphologists, Slavists and cognitive linguists, addresses two questions: How can the morphology-phonology interface be accommodated in cognitive linguistics? Do morphophonological alternations have a meaning? These questions are explored on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of stem alternations in Russian verbs. The analysis is couched in R.W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar framework, but the book offers comparisons to other varieties of cognitive linguistics, such as Construction Grammar and Conceptual Integration. The proposed analysis is furthermore compared to rule-based and constraint-based approaches to phonology in generative grammar.

Although Cognitive Grammar does not assume underlying representations or procedural rules, it is shown that the framework facilitates an insightful approach to abstract phonology. An important advantage is restrictiveness; Cognitive Grammar provides an analysis of all phenomena under scrutiny in terms of a parsimonious set of theoretical constructs that all have cognitive motivation. No ad hoc machinery is invoked, and the analysis yields strong empirical predictions.

Another advantage is the fact that Cognitive Grammar enables us to capture the meaning of morphophonological alternations. It is argued that stem alternations in Russian verbs conspire to signal non-past meaning.

This book is accessible to a broad readership and offers a welcome contribution to phonology and morphology, which have been understudied areas in cognitive linguistics.