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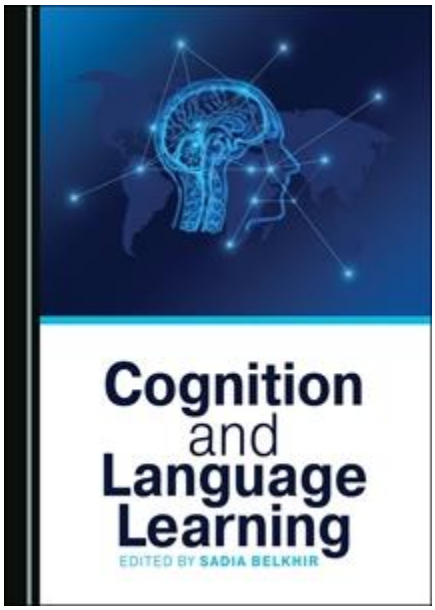
Book Review

Cognition and Language Learning



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Authors: Kamila Ammour, Katia Berbar, Amel Benaissa, Sadia Belkhir, Fatima Zohra Chalal, Hanane Ait Hamouda, Georgios Georgiou, Nora Achili, Sadia Belkhir;
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It is quite vital to study issues related to a complex phenomenon as the human language, but it is attention-grabbing to be focused on aspects related to cognition. The cognitive side of language analysis and study can cover a wide range of aspects namely language processing, vocabulary, memory, attrition, metacognition, etc. Sadia Belkhir comes to offer an interesting combination of themes related to cognition in language learning. The collection includes scholars who attempted to analyse diverse topics related to a number of key cognitive factors in the field of FLL in different learning contexts.

Sadia Belkhir has been devoted to cognition and learning strategies for years and this gave birth to this volume. The book fluctuates between a theoretical body of literature related to cognitive aspects of language learning and practical considerations through fieldwork research. This equilibrated material in terms of cognition in language learning research can serve as a guideline to graduate and postgraduate students, novice researchers working on cognition in language learning, teachers, practitioners, and researchers at large.

The edited book is published in March 2020 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. The volume is divided into nine chapters and contains 153 pages. The topics included in the contributions treat diverse though complementary information related, but not limited to cognition per se, metacognition, attrition, perception and ability, memorisation. In addition, authors treated various linguistic aspects namely vocabulary, reading, speaking, phonetics, discourse, literature, and technology.

The opening chapter written by Sadia Belkhir serves as an introduction to the edited book. It relates language learning to cognition, but English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in particular. The author presents a rich theoretical background and explains explicitly the shift from behavioural to cognitive theories of language learning, and offers a wide range of research conducted on the field of cognition. The chapter is the gate of the book since it covers a general account of the book, its objectives, and chapters.

The more we go through the chapters, the more narrowed down the topics are. This second chapter presented by Kamilia Ammour treats metacognitive awareness in narrative texts. The author focuses on reading literary texts and the way learners use their metacognitive awareness and reading strategies. It should be noted that reading literary texts needs a specific type of strategy use. Kamilia tries to explore strategy use and its frequency through a case study using a survey. The author's findings are revealing. Students are found to use reading strategies to interpret texts but are limited to the word level. The author concluded that learners lack metacognitive awareness and use reading strategies in an inefficient way. Hence, students can face problems in tasks and activities related to "critical reading comprehension" often present in EFL classes.

As for Zohra Chalal, she selects one aspect of language and relates it to attrition in a particular context. In other words, the author works on vocabulary attrition in a multilingual context specific to the Kabyle region in Algeria. Using a test, Zohra tries to find out whether "the savings paradigm as a method […] assumes that once a word is learned, there are residues of knowledge that can be used to reactivate it". Findings revealed that it is easier and faster to recall the English vocabulary learned at ease in the past than new vocabulary even though the respondents stopped using English. The savings method can be effective, according to the findings, to prevent attrition since it helps the language user to retain the already learned

vocabulary in English. This research is quite interesting for workers in the field of vocabulary learning and use.

From vocabulary learning, the book moves a step forward to a specific type of writing. Sadia Belkhir treats the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) as a method to promote written discourse through the identification of metaphors. The author through her experimental study performed with graduate and postgraduate students tried to analyse MIP's possible influence on their cognitive capacity to distinguish metaphors in written text. Sadia could find that MIP is a method that partly assists subjects in the recognition of metaphors, and knowledge about metaphors is partly memorised by most subjects. For her, this witnessed problem can be remedied by daily practice in metaphor identification in discourse.

The book has not only treated one aspect of language or one particular language. Georgios P. Georgiou to uncover the perceptual patterns of Arabic in relation to the vowels of Greek as an L2 among adult speakers. Through his experimental design, the participants passed through vowel assimilation and vowel contrast discrimination tests (AXB). The discrimination test was also undertaken by a control group consisting of Cypriot Greek speakers. The study revealed interesting findings regarding the listeners' perception and the assimilation of vowels. That is, the author implies that the listeners' native language has a strong effect on the perception of the second language vowels. Georgios ended the chapter with the salient place of stress as a meaningful part of second language perception.

When dealing with cognitive strategies, one cannot deny skills related to memory, retention, and information retrieval. The sixth chapter of this volume related such skills to cognitive abilities. Amel Benaissa suggests techniques to develop such skills through using online quizlets and digital flashcards. Amel favours the use of Quizlets and digital flashcards given their positive role in turning learning online for students to develop their cognitive skills on the one hand, and develop their vocabulary in English on the other at all the information-processing stages. The author worked her quasi-experimental design with first-year university students to test the effective retention and retrieval of new words. To measure the lexical development of the students, pre and post vocabulary tests were used. Results showed that participants who were exposed to computers and to the mobile version of the Quizlet website could develop better their vocabulary, but less effective for the Quizlets programmes .

Nora Chilli comes to treat the question from another perspective. She tries to relate students' perceptions of success and failure to the attribution theory. Through her trial to understand EFL students' perceptions, she tries to shed light on the impact of past experiences of success and failure on future language performance; which are more likely bound to cognitive processes namely when approaching failure. Through her case study, she worked with advanced Algerian EFL learners (N°= 62) adopting a quantitative method through a causal attribution questionnaire. Her findings were revealing since the participants attributed their success to

external factors like supportive family and friends, but they focused more on internal factors such as motivation and personal effort. As for failure, they attributed it to both internal and external causes by referring to task difficulty and poor teachers for external factors, and lack of effort and poor learning strategies as internal reasons.

Always under the lines of cognitive processes, Katia Berbar tied the phenomenon to an affective factor, which is anxiety. In her thesis, she advanced its debilitating effect because of the demanding nature of FLL and the complexity of language performance and academic achievement. That is why; both affect and cognition play a complementary role to succeed in a satisfactory achievement. Katia relates anxiety arousal to cognitive activity through monitoring the learning process (input, processing, and output). Her work tries to measure the anxiety level at each learning stage in order to diagnose its impact on cognitive processes. Through her quantitative method via questionnaires handed to first-year EFL students (N°= 65) enrolled at the University of Tizi-Ouzou, she could handle data using a descriptive approach. Findings revealed high levels of anxiety in the three stages of learning (input, processing, and output). According to her, "anxiety arousal at the input stage prevented learners from understanding vocabulary items in the target language. At the processing stage, anxiety impaired students' cognitive ability. Anxiety at the output stage obstructed the retrieval of the previously studied material and precluded learners from communicating in English".

Ihe last chapter Hanane Ait Hamouda studies perception in relation to code-switching in the EFL context. The study treats the way students perceive code-switching in the language classroom in order to see whether they approach it negatively or not in terms of the cognitive process while producing English. The quantitative method was employed via online questionnaires answered by graduate students at the University of Tizi-Ouzou. Results indicated that EFL classes in the selected context of this research do not have a pure target language environment and the students perceive the non-pure English language environment positively. Additionally, code-switching in EFL classes does not alter the students' language production process.

Sadia Belkhir could gather pertinent papers from EFL contexts to tackle cognition in language learning. The book can be an interesting reference to students, teachers, action researchers, doctoral students, and workers in the field of cognitive strategies in language learning and teaching. Besides, the book Sadia offers can serve as a comparative source with other published materials in other parts of the world. This can incite discussion, constructive criticism, and replication of studies in different contexts.

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