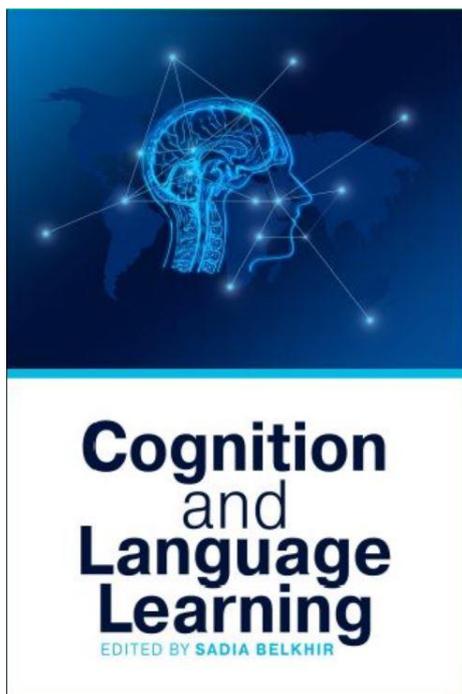




Book Review



Cognition and Language Learning, by Sadia Belkhir (Ed.), Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2020, 157 pp., ISBN 1-5275-4482-6, 978-1-5275-4482-6

Language can be seen as attached closely to the general cognitive abilities of human beings, and language learning is regarded as constituting complicated mental processes in which language is received, stored, and retrieved by the mind (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007; Ertmer & Newby, 1993). This is the core viewpoint of cognitive linguistics and cognitivism reflected as the theoretical background for the whole volume edited by Sadia Belkhir. With eight research reports of independent studies, the book concerns the interplay between cognition and foreign language learning, and is targeted at undergraduate and graduate students, teachers, educational practitioners, and researchers. The chapters are summarized below, followed by a brief account of the limitations and values of the book.

Chapter 1 is an introduction in which the editor sketches out the shift from behavioral to cognitive approaches to language learning, and some major research directions such as language processing mechanisms in task-based learning or the determination of language fluency through the cognitive science approach. The chapter also provides an overview of the subsequent chapters, each of which deals specifically with such issues as cognition and skills development, language processing, vocabulary memorization, metaphor identification, vocabulary attrition, motivation, perception of phonemes, anxiety and cognitive processing, and code-switching and English language production.

In Chapter 2, Kamila Ammour explored EFL university students' metacognitive awareness of strategies employed in reading narrative texts. With an adapted questionnaire as the only research instrument conducted on undergraduate students, the study highlights important results, namely the overuse of such reading strategies as word-attack and planning, and the lack of metacognitive awareness. The researcher emphasizes the need for guiding and raising EFL students' metacognitive awareness by suggesting several useful and practical tips such as providing explicit instruction on why and how reading strategies can be used or how to vary reading strategies according to text types and task objectives.

In response to the issue of foreign language attrition in relation to instructed foreign languages, in Chapter 3, Fatima Zohra reports an experimental study conducted on postgraduate students. This case study adopted the savings paradigm as its major method, which assumes that once a word is learned, it can be reactivated due to its residues of knowledge. The results show that the participants relearned the words they had once acquired more quickly because with the residual knowledge of the words in their memories, they activated the words once faced with them again. The study raises EFL teachers'



awareness of applying the savings method to reduce lexical decay and maximize the memorization and retention of words in formal class instruction.

Chapter 4 reports an experimental study undertaken by Sadia Belkhir. The study explored whether students' cognitive abilities can be facilitated by the method called Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a method to identify metaphoric expressions used in discourse. With a questionnaire administered to postgraduate students, the results indicate that the MIP procedure plus formal training could boost the ability to identify metaphors. The researcher also raises the awareness of interfering factors including memory limits, distraction, and mental fatigue.

Similar to Chapter 4, Chapter 5 presents another experimental study initiated by Georgios P. Georgiou that focuses on exploring Arabic speakers' perception of the vowels of Greek as their second language. For the purpose, Arabic adult speakers participated in the Greek vowel assimilation and discrimination tests designed in line with the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM). The results show the interference of the L1 (Egyptian Arabic) in the L2 (Cypriot Greek) as a result of phonological and phonetic differences. This finding indicates the influence of the native language on the perception of the second language and the important role of stress for second language perception due to the differences in the learners' perception of stressed and unstressed vowel contrasts.

As a unique paper in the volume examining the link between the cognitive approach and the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, the report in Chapter 6 is concerned with a quasi-experimental study launched by Amel Benaissa. The study aims to examine the effect of online quiz-lets and digital flashcards on vocabulary acquisition. With the use of the combined pre-tests, training, and post-tests, the study confirms the facilitative role of technology in the memorization and retention of words. The research report also raises the awareness and shows the benefits of using technology in the development of students' vocabulary knowledge both in and out of the classroom.

Chapter 7 deals with a study done by Nora Achili that explores the causes of EFL students' success and failure in their exams and language learning. With the aid of a causal attribution questionnaire completed by master's students, the study demonstrates that EFL learners' success is attributed more to internal reasons such as motivation and personal efforts than to external ones, and that their failure is attributed to both external factors such as task difficulty and poor teachers and internal factors such as lack of effort and poor learning strategies. The researcher emphasizes the need for attribution training to equip students with the causal attribution ability to understand success and failure in their language learning experience.

In an attempt to touch upon the interplay between cognitive and affective factor in language learning, Chapter 8 presents a case study performed by Katia Berbar. The study measures the impact of anxiety on students' triple stages of language learning: input, processing, and output. With the help of a Likert questionnaire administered to first-year students, the findings confirm the negative influence of anxiety on all the stages. The outcomes highlight the negative influences on cognitive processing including the prevention of language input from the cognitive processing system, and the inhibition of the ability to think and accomplish the tasks. The study helps raise the awareness of EFL teachers regarding the identification of students' emotional states and the application of measures to reduce the detrimental effects of anxiety.

The final chapter presents the results of a study carried out by Hanane Ait Hamouda that explores students' perceptions of code-switching in EFL classes. Based on the analysis of the data collected from a questionnaire administered to master's students, the findings show that code-switching is perceived positively as a communicative strategy in an EFL environment, and that it does not affect students' cognitive process of language production.

However, the book has two distinct features that may be regarded as its limitations. The first one is that all the studies tend to focus mainly on the internal cognitive processes. Therefore, those who are interested in the socio-cognitive or socio-cultural processes may not find this book very useful, although it can offer a view from the inside. The second one is that as these are all small-scale studies conducted by teacher researchers within their specific instructional practices, the results are substantially context-specific and far from being generalizable. Thus, those who get accustomed to reading studies conducted

by experts or professional researchers might find this volume of little value, though they may be presented with EFL practitioners' multiple facets of research perspectives.

Overall, the values of this book outweigh its limitations. The values of the book lie at least in two aspects. First, the study results contribute to shedding light on the interplay between cognitive processes and foreign language learning, helping practitioners and researchers to be more aware of the importance of the cognitive linguistics. Second, language teachers, postgraduate students, and novice researchers may gain inspiration about classroom research from the different studies that are conducted by classroom teachers to tackle problems emerging from their own classrooms in their own contexts.

References

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