

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Second language task complexity: researching the cognition hypothesis of language learning and performance**, by P. Robinson, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2011, xii + 345 pp., £33.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-90-272-0720-3

As the field of task-based language teaching (TBLT) has grown during the past two decades, understanding the effects of task complexity on second language (L2) development has become more relevant for educators and researchers. Intended for the novice as well as the erudite specialist, this clearly written and well-organized book presents 12 carefully selected chapters addressing the theoretical motivations and methodological issues in task complexity and second language acquisition research, as well as a diverse selection of empirical studies examining the various aspects of the cognition hypothesis and its predictions on language development and performance. Divided into four sections, *Second language task complexity: Researching the Cognition Hypothesis of language learning and performance* offers the reader a variety of chapters examining the central tenets and pedagogical implications of the cognition hypothesis (CH), which states that complex tasks should foster greater interaction, uptake and learning, particularly regarding learners' accuracy and complexity, than less complex tasks. The cutting-edge research featured in this volume examines the effects of task complexity from multiple perspectives, ranging from corpus-based and psycholinguistic approaches to studies examining the effects of task complexity on affective and cognitive factors, such as learner anxiety or working memory.

Serving as a useful review for those familiar with task complexity research and as an articulate introduction for novices, the first section of the volume provides readers with a thorough and clear overview of the various theoretical and pedagogical issues that have motivated task complexity research. Following a description of how TBLT programs might integrate procedures for task analysis and task complexity, Robinson's introductory chapter offers the reader a rich discussion on the key aspects of task complexity research. Through clear explanations of the triadic componential framework (TCF) for evaluating task demands, which differentiates between cognitive, learner and interactive factors impacting task complexity, difficulty and conditions, respectively, and easy-to-understand descriptions of important distinctions, such as the resources-directing and resources-dispersing task characteristics outlined in the TCF, this introduction reviews the theoretical foundations of the approach and addresses relevant discoveries regarding tasks and development from other fields. Also discussed are the principal claims of the CH, including the predicted effects of increasing task complexity on second language production and development. In addition, the introduction reviews the rationale behind these predictions, as well as the various methodologies used by previous empirical research to examine the CH's expected outcomes and results.

Building on the foundation established in the first chapter, Kormos' chapter discusses the application of the CH to a bilingual mode of speech production, demonstrating that resource-directing tasks, which differentiate task characteristics depending on the concepts the task requires in order to be understood, may lead to improved lexical, syntactic and

morphological processing, while the chapter by Wulff and Gries provides readers with a novel approach to learner accuracy grounded in Ellis's Associative Cognitive CREED (2007). Wulff and Gries then illustrate this measure using naturalistic data from both L1 and L2 corpora, providing the reader with a detailed discussion of the implications for task design and second language instruction. Focusing more closely on empirical research, the second section includes studies addressing how varying task complexity in different task types, such as in oral or written modes, affects accuracy, complexity and fluency in second language production. For example, Kuiken and Vedder's chapter reports positive effects from increased task complexity on learners' accuracy in both oral and written modes, while Gilabert, Baron and Levkina's study indicates variable proficiency effects depending on monologic and dialogic task modes.

The third section continues the focus on research with three empirical studies addressing the impact of increased task complexity on learner interaction, learner production of modified output and the amount of uptake during task-based interactions. Continuing the theme of monologic and dialogic tasks found in Gilabert et al., Michel's chapter suggests that improved accuracy and fluency are more likely to occur in interactive tasks when compared to monologic tasks. The study by Nuevo, Adams and Ross-Feldman addresses the impact of task complexity on learners' development in specific L2 domains, finding that increased and decreased task complexity led to improvements in different areas, including modified output and past tense morphology. The multi-faceted study by Révész, Sachs and Mackey examines the impact of task complexity on interaction, uptake and L2 development, with results suggesting uptake was a significant predictor of L2 development in less complex tasks.

Extending the themes of the second and third sections, the final section includes four empirical chapters examining the relationship between individual learner characteristics and simple and complex tasks. Focusing on factors related to the effects of task complexity on interaction, learning and speech production, these chapters operationalize learners' individual differences in cognitive abilities and affective factors, including creativity, working memory capacity, anxiety and factors impacting task perception, such as motivation. For instance, Albert's chapter examines the association between creativity and simple and complex oral narrative tasks, while the chapter by Kormos and Trebits investigates the connection between learners' working memory capacity and their performance on narrative tasks. Kim and Tracy-Ventura address the influence of learners' speaking anxiety on task perceptions, finding that although anxiety levels were differentially related to L2 development, there was no overall interaction between task complexity and anxiety levels. Ishikawa's multi-faceted study examines the influence of varying the complexity in intentional reasoning demands on learner perceptions, with results suggesting that tasks with increased reasoning demands were perceived as not only more complex, but also more interesting, suggesting possible implications for task-based teaching.

In general, the empirical research included in this volume provides valuable advances to the field regarding the theoretical underpinnings, as well as the pedagogical applications, of task complexity and its' effects on L2 learning and performance. In addition, through their diverse research agendas, these studies provide a foundation for future research into the relationship between task complexity and L2 development. Researchers will be encouraged to further investigate the impact of increased task complexity in second language learning in a variety of ways, ranging from the more frequently examined effects on accuracy and fluency to more innovative inquiry into the cognitive, affective and psycholinguistic aspects of the predictions of the CH. Furthermore, these chapters offer the reader a fresh look at how task complexity might be manipulated within the task-based teaching curriculum, providing inspiration for educators and researchers alike. With some of the chapters explicitly

addressing the implications for instruction and task design, such as those by Kim and Tracy-Ventura and Albert, this volume would be a useful resource to any instructor interested in incorporating cutting-edge task-based research into a class curriculum. Researchers will also find this book valuable, as not only does the introduction provide a comprehensive overview of the foundation of the CH and task complexity research findings to date, it also offers a thorough review for the more experienced researcher, with subsequent chapters, such as that by Révész, Sachs, and Mackey, providing sound models for exploring the effects of task complexity in future research. However, because not all results support the hypothesized predictions, a final, critical reflection of the overall theoretical and methodological contributions by the volume's editor would have been a welcome addition. Overall, this volume is a first-rate resource for students, educators and researchers interested in pursuing task-based research or curricula, and would make an ideal supplementary textbook for an undergraduate or graduate TBLT course.

### Reference

Ellis, N. 2007. The Associative Cognitive CREED. In *Theories of second language acquisition: An introduction*, ed. Bill VanPatten and Jessica Williams, 77–95. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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**Current issues in bilingualism: cognitive and socio-linguistic perspectives**, edited by M. Leikin, M. Schwartz, and Y. Tobin, London, Springer, 2012, 265 pp., £89 (hardback), ISBN 978-94-007-2326-9

Interest in bilingualism and multilingualism has grown tremendously in the past 20 years. Realizing the theoretical as well as practical significance of delving into bilingualism or multilingualism, Leikin, Schwartz and Tobin present a volume containing a number of experimental studies focusing on major aspects in this field. Addressing the distinctive language fabric of Israel, which represents one of the multifaceted cases of multilingual and multicultural society, the variety of studies in this volume could be generalized to other countries and societies. Israeli society includes various communities who speak multiple languages. Although Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages of Israel, English is the lingua franca, the ticket to academic life. In the 1980s, waves of immigrants came from Russia and Ethiopia, contributing immensely to the complicated fabric of Israeli linguistic diversity. The studies in this book identify grammatical functions apparent among bilingual speakers, as well as connections between the language spoken at home and students' academic performance. In addition, some studies focus on the psychological aspects of acquiring a second language.

After the introduction (Chapter 1), the chapters in this book are divided into three parts. Part 1 (Chapters 2–4) is about language and literacy in multilingual society. In Chapter 2, Kahn-Horwitz, Sparks and Goldstein discuss the relevance of the Linguistic Coding Difference Hypothesis to English as an additional literacy in Israel. This study

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