

Book Review: Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology

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Edited by Robert M. DeKeyser

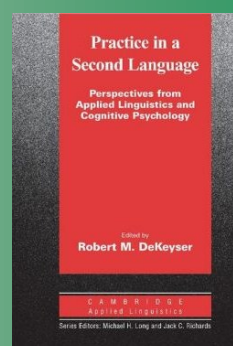
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Teacher-practitioners have always understood that practice is a necessity for second language (L2) learning. However, the concept of practice has rarely been considered from a theoretical perspective. The book, *Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology*, edited by Robert M. DeKeyser, attempts to remedy that oversight. This volume of twelve original articles (one of the many volumes in the Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series) examines practice in reference to the four basic skills in language learning: writing, reading, listening and speaking. The introductory article by DeKeyser, “Situating the Concept of Practice”, provides a succinct overview of how practice is perceived in applied linguistics, cognitive psychology and educational psychology. He also defines the concept of practice as “specific activities in the second language, engaged in systematically, deliberately, with the goals of developing knowledge of and skills in the second language” (pp. 1 & 8). He then presents an overview of the current understanding of practice in both cognitive and educational psychology (specifically in the area of applied linguistics).

The four chapters in the first section, “Foundations”, focus on the context of practice, specifically what “aspects of practice

should hold true for all learning in all contexts” (p. 19). In this section practice is subdivided into receptive (input) practice (Ronald Leow), output practice (Hitoshi Muranoi), interaction as practice (Alison MacKey) and the role of feedback in practice (Jennifer Leeman). Leow conducts a review of the relevant literature and studies on receptive practice which he defines as authentic or artificial L2 input that provides examples of the target L2 which learners can use to practice the L2 (p. 22). Muranoi examines the current psycholinguistic models of L2 output, and also reviews empirical studies on the effects of output practice in reading, writing, and speaking. MacKey reviews the relevant literature and explores how different interactional processes, for example negotiating for meaning, impact L2 learners. Finally, Leeman rounds off the first section by discussing the importance of feedback, the theories behind giving feedback and links this to empirical studies on negative feedback.

The four chapters of section two, “Institutional Contexts”, look at practice in specific contexts, both formal educational contexts and informal situations: immersion (Leila Ranta and Roy Lyster), second language education (Kris Van den Branden), foreign language classrooms (Lourdes Ortega), and

study abroad as practice (Robert DeKeyser). Ranta and Lyster argue that immersion does not equate to realistic opportunities to practice and offer suggestions how this can be remedied. Van den Branden lays out suggestions to make practice in the L2 classroom more relevant to authentic communication outside the classroom. Ortega looks at practice from a cognitive-interactionist perspective and argues that “meaningful use of language drives acquisition” (p. 180) and, therefore, language practice (in foreign language classrooms) should have a communicative purpose and not just be practice by rote or repetition. The last chapter by DeKeyser, similar to Chapter 5 by Ranta and Lyster, looks at L2 practice by students who are studying abroad. DeKeyser examines the literature on the progress students make in language acquisition while studying abroad, and demonstrates that students who study abroad often gain fluency but not accuracy.

The two chapters in section three, “Individual Differences”, look at how the age (Carmen Muñoz) and aptitude of individual learners (Peter Robinson) affect their practice. Muñoz reviews the relevant research, from both psychology and second language acquisition, on age-related differences in L2 acquisition. She demonstrates that young children are not necessarily better at language learning and suggests that different classroom

activities embedded in practice are appropriate for different individuals at different ages. Robinson examines how an individual's aptitude for language learning is influenced by various “cognitive demands of practice” (p. 256), in other words the mental exertion required to perform a learning task. The final chapter presents an overview of all three sections to extricate best L2 language practice. In this concluding chapter, also written by DeKeyser, he summarizes the issues addressed throughout the book: which type of practice or practice activities are appropriate depending on the goal of the practice, in which context the practice is taking place and, most importantly, for what type of learner(s).

This volume is an excellent resource for second-language educators, curriculum developers, graduate students and education researchers. The glossary at the end of the book is both useful and essential for those without a background in cognitive psychology or applied linguistics. Although *Practice in a Second Language* is a book about theory and provides little in the way of instructional or application models, there is a lot of useful information, if the reader is patient and determined, that could be used to improve practice or help teacher-practitioners reflect on their practice in a variety of L2 and foreign language teaching classrooms.



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