

Practice in Second Language Learning

Bringing together an international team of researchers, this volume explores practice in second language learning – activities which aim to develop skills in or knowledge of a second language. The book begins with two theoretical overviews of practice as applied to learning to speak in a second language and in cognitive accounts of second language acquisition. This theory underpins the volume, which is split into two main sections: receptive and productive practice. The studies in these sections look at practice in English, German and Spanish as a second language in various contexts, including traditional classrooms, periods of study abroad and online language learning. The differing research designs used mean that the chapters contain clear implications for classroom pedagogy and further directions for research, teaching and learning in different contexts.

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Practice in Second Language Learning

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Foreword

Practice: Time for a Reappraisal?

Robert M. DeKeyser

In DeKeyser (2007) I lamented how little research had focused on deliberate practice in second language learning, and how even the idea that extensive practice is necessary for second language learning, just as it is for athletic or musical performance, seemed questionable to some. Research in second language acquisition has not exactly taken a turn towards practice in the last 10 years, but as the chapters in this book and the literature quoted therein show, there is a growing body of research that investigates the effect of a variety of types of deliberate practice. This research makes it increasingly clear that practice does not mean drill and kill, that deliberate practice is compatible with a variety of theoretical perspectives and that all domains of language, from pronunciation and grammar to vocabulary and pragmatics, can benefit from systematic practice.

This increasing interest in and appreciation of practice have intensified the focus on a number of core questions about second language learning. How important is production practice in comparison with comprehension practice (e.g. Shintani, Li and Ellis 2013; DeKeyser and Prieto Botana 2015; Shintani 2015)? To what extent and how should corrective feedback be given during oral and written practice (e.g. Li 2010; Lyster and Saito 2010; van Beuningen, de Jong and Kuiken 2012; Shintani and Aubrey 2016)? What do students get out of practice with specific tasks and in specific contexts, such as study abroad (e.g. DeKeyser 2010; Ren 2013; Baker-Smemoe et al. 2014; Jensen and Howard 2014; Pérez-Vidal 2014; Briggs 2016; Yang 2016), synchronous computer-mediated communication (e.g. Sauro and Smith 2010) or task-based language teaching (e.g. Skehan 2014; Shintani 2016)?

Other aspects of the study of practice are still much more common in research on skill acquisition and other areas of cognitive psychology, but are also stirring new interest in applied linguistics. Questions being asked by such research include the following: What are the advantages of task repetition (DeKeyser, forthcoming; de Jong and Perfetti 2011; Hawkes 2012; Manchón 2014; Thai and Boers 2016)? How should practice be distributed (e.g. Bird 2010; Serrano 2011; Sobel, Cepeda and Kapler 2011; Carpenter et al. 2012; Nakata 2015; Rogers 2015; Paik and Ritter

2016; Suzuki and DeKeyser 2017a)? How do individual differences help determine what practice is best (e.g. Suzuki and DeKeyser 2017b; Morgan-Short et al. 2014; Tanner, Inoue and Osterhout 2014; Yilmaz and Granena 2016)? Most important of all, perhaps, is the question about the extent to which the effect of practice transfers to other structures, tasks, contexts or skills (e.g. McCrudden 2011; Spada et al. 2014; Parks 2015; Li and DeKeyser, forthcoming).

In all these areas there are tentative answers (e.g. corrective feedback helps; both reception and production practice are important; repetition leads to increased fluency; distributed practice is best; the effect of practice tends to be very specific; individual difference can play a big role and lead to clear aptitude-treatment interaction effects), but as the chapters in this volume attempt to show, ongoing research is providing an ever richer set of findings showing how complex the question is of what practice activities are best for whom, for what structures, for which skill, at what time and in what context. These questions, and the research field which this volume contributes to, show us that exciting times lie ahead for the study of this topic that is so central to second language acquisition.

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