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Interaction, Feedback and Task Research in Second Language Learning

The role of interaction and corrective feedback is central to research in second language learning and teaching, and this volume is the first of its kind to explain and apply design methodologies and materials in an approachable way. Using examples from interaction, feedback, and task studies, it presents clear and practical advice on how to carry out research in these areas, providing step-by-step guides to design and methodological principles, suggestions for reading, short activities, memory aids, and an A–Z glossary for easy reference. Its informative approach to study design, and in-depth discussions of implementing research methodology, make it accessible to novice and experienced researchers alike. Commonly used tools in these paradigms are explained, including stimulated recalls, surveys, eye-tracking, meta-analysis, and research synthesis. Open research areas and gaps in the literature are also discussed, providing a point of departure for researchers making their first foray into interaction, feedback, and task-based teaching research.

Alison Mackey is a leading international expert in input, interaction, and feedback in L2 learning, and in L2 research methodology. She has published sixteen books (one of which won the Modern Language Association's Mildenburger Prize) and more than a hundred articles in these areas. At Georgetown University, where she is Professor of Linguistics, she has received both The President's Award for Distinguished Scholar–Teachers and The Provost's Career Research Award.

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Interaction, Feedback and Task Research in Second Language Learning

Methods and Design

Alison Mackey

Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

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For my mother, Deanna Mackey. Her confidence in me is the reason I can write. And for my children, Miranda Mackey Yarowsky and William Mackey Yarowsky, whose daily interaction and feedback (along with that of their father) is a continual reminder of what's fun and important in life.

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Preface

This book is designed to help those who are thinking about carrying out studies of interaction, feedback, or tasks and their role in second language learning, as well as those who want to appraise, critique, or better understand studies that they are reading in the literature in terms of the methods used. My goal in the book is to provide all the information that researchers might need to carry out a study, in a format that is as reader-friendly as possible. To aid with these goals, the book contains boxed inset "Read It!" studies to illustrate the main points, "Keep It in Mind!" bullets to summarize the gist, "Try It!" suggestions to provide opportunities for hands-on practice, and a glossary giving short definitions of all the key terms. Cartoons are included as amusing memory aids. I have also included some new findings from data that haven't been published before in two of the chapters to address topics that are currently of high interest in the area. Overall, my hope is that this book will support and inspire more research into the three closely related areas of interaction, feedback, and tasks, and how they combine to promote second language learning.

I begin in Chapter 1, with a short summary of some of the theoretical and empirical foundations for work in interaction, feedback, and tasks, including how these constructs are related, and then move on to what I hope will be of significant interest to many readers – a review and discussion of what I believe to be some timely open questions and interesting research problems in the field in these three closely related areas.

In Chapter 2, I talk about the wide range of different kinds of research designs and approaches available to further our understanding of how interaction, feedback, and tasks can drive learning.

Individual differences in interaction, feedback, and task research is the topic of Chapter 3, where I describe frequently used measures like working memory and aptitude scores, before moving on to a so far relatively under-studied area, cognitive creativity. This is a construct which is relatively new to the field of second language acquisition, and certainly, to interaction, feedback, and task research, and one that I believe has promise as we look for insights into the relationship between interaction, feedback, tasks, and L2 learning. For this reason, it is one of the chapters where I present new data and results from two

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previously unpublished studies of creativity, concluding with recommendations for how these cognitive-creativity measures might be used in future research.

In Chapter 4, I move in a different direction, discussing introspective methods, which are also widely used in L2 research in general, and are particularly helpful for understanding the cognitive and social processes that underlie interaction-driven learning.

I turn to survey-based research in Chapter 5, including interviews, and explaining the advantages of moving towards mixed-methods approaches in interaction, feedback, and task research. Again, I present some new findings from a survey designed to uncover information about learners' awareness of and preference for feedback and the relation of this to gender.

In Chapter 6, I talk about the importance of taking a step outwards and looking at the big picture. I describe synthetic and meta-analytic work and provide a hands-on guide for how to do it and why and when it's important to take stock in interaction, feedback, and task-based research by doing this sort of work, as well as pointing out some of the potential pitfalls.

While recognizing that instructional settings is an umbrella term that covers a huge range of different contexts and learners, from migrants to the commonly used population of college-aged adults, in Chapter 7, I cover this sort of research, finishing with a discussion particular to the research issues involving children as they interact in classrooms with tasks. There is not very much written about the logistics of carrying out research with school-aged children (and younger), and so in the second part of this chapter, I aim to raise awareness of these issues in relation to work on interaction, feedback, and tasks.

In Chapter 8, I move on to current new directions in interaction, task, and feedback research, beginning with the currently popular eye-tracking paradigm, then discussing new imaging techniques like ultrasound as articulatory mechanism feedback, and moving to the relationship between neurolinguistics and interaction, task, and feedback research, including EEGs, MEGs, and fMRIs, as well as some of the more commonly used psycholinguistic techniques used in interaction research, like priming.

In Chapter 9, I talk about coding and analysis issues particular to interaction, feedback, and task research, including information on both quantitative and qualitative/interpretivist analyses. I conclude this chapter by including information about the propensity of the field to target educated college-aged students in research, and the new moves towards

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targeting populations more diverse than the traditional Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) ones.

I conclude the book in Chapter 10, which covers pitfalls in interaction, feedback, and task research and work in related areas, by describing scenarios adapted from situations and events that have happened to me, to a few of my current and former students, and to my colleagues and friends over twenty years of carrying out research into interaction, feedback, and communicative tasks. Some of these scenarios are humorous in retrospect, and they are all derived from authentic events.

I could not have come close to finishing this book without two things. The first is my position at Georgetown University, where I have been privileged to work for more than two decades. One of Georgetown's many strengths is its adherence to the concept of *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person. In 2016, when I lost my beloved mother unexpectedly, I thought I would never be able to write another book. However, my students, colleagues, friends, and administrators at Georgetown gently helped me to remember, in multiple (implicit) ways, how lucky I am to have the academic life I do, enjoying so many freedoms and so much institutional support, together with teaching and mentoring challenges and rewards that made me want to stay current and committed. I am also fortunate to be able to spend time and summers working at Lancaster University in the U.K., where I have close friends and collaborators, and where the Department of Linguistics and English Language positively brims with research talent and opportunity.

The second is the invaluable help of my extremely talented former and current students working as research assistants. Lara Bryfonski, Ashleigh Pipes, Derek Reagan, Ayşenur Sağdıç, and Rachel Thorson Hernández have provided more assistance in multiple ways and over various time periods than I could have hoped for. They, along with Margaret Borowczyk, Erin Fell, and Yasser Teimouri, have approached the tasks I have asked them to do with a welcome combination of grit, wit, and humor as well as vision, attention to detail, and a work ethic second to none. I know that they will each produce excellent books after they do their dissertations, because they went above and beyond for me on this book, in ways that make me feel privileged to have worked with them. Although it was not by any means her only research assistant task, all the cartoons in this book were created by the multi-talented Rachel Thorson Hernández, who has a quirky sense of humor that's a good match for mine, in addition to her research skills.

Cambridge University Press enjoys, of course, a premier reputation in the field of publishing and I believe this is very deservedly so. I have

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worked for half a decade with the journal staff, all of whom have been careful, efficient, prompt, and talented people. This volume has been my first experience with the book branch of the press, and it has been an all-round excellent experience. Rebecca Taylor and Ishwarya Mathavan provided the perfect balance of reminders, forbearing, and support.

My family, particularly my two children, Miranda Mackey Yarowsky and William Mackey Yarowsky, put up with quite a lot of "the book" excuses for working at odd times. I have to imagine my mother, Deanna Mackey's, interaction and feedback these days, but I am getting better at doing that. I thank all of them and promise I am now free to download and watch the *Secret Life of Pets* movies whenever requested.

Any remaining mistakes in this book are, of course, entirely my own, although I do hear they say "to err is human but to really mess up, you need technology." You can read a tale about how technology can contribute to research fails in the final chapter.

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