

lostness hardly seemed to correlate with subjective lostness. More detailed results showed that measures of graph compactness or linearity proved to be the best predictors of task success for certain subtasks. Therefore, the effects of different tasks (e.g. learning vs. information seeking) may affect the sensitivity of predictive models.

The studies clearly show that a variety of easily computed measures could be useful in characterizing and predicting lostness. Furthermore, the notion of lostness is useful in predicting success in information-seeking tasks.

*Luuk Van Waes*

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## Designing surveys

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R. F. Belli, F.G. Conrad and D.B. Wright (2007). **Cognitive psychology and survey methodology: nurturing the continuing dialogue between disciplines.** *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 21 (2), 141–287.

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In standardized questionnaires, many aspects of the questionnaire context unintentionally distort the answers provided by respondents. For instance, subtle differences in question wording, or variation in the order of questions or response options cause the reported attitudes or behaviors to change substantially. Since about the 1980s, researchers have investigated the causes of these changes in answers. Survey researchers have used theories from cognitive and social psychology (as well as linguistics) to describe the cognitive processes that take place during

question answering. At the same time, psychologists and linguists have used the standardized survey to advance cognitive theories: theories on question answering, text interpretation and attitude change can be tested in surveys. Surveys offer a natural language use arena in a real world setting in which language use or cognitive processes can be studied in a controlled way, several versions of a survey can be offered without respondents ever noticing, and reaction times or even eyemovements can be measured quite unobtrusively in web surveys.

This dialogue between psychology and survey research is known as the Cognitive Aspects of Survey Methodology (CASM) movement. This special issue of *Applied Cognitive Psychology* illustrates work in this field in various interesting contributions. Research reported in this special issue (as well as the introduction by Belli et al., pp. 142-144), and the overview by Norbert Schwarz, pp. 278-287) shows that while efforts to test cognitive theories in a survey context may advance cognitive theory (without necessarily leading to immediate practical advice for survey design) and that cognitive theories are often used to explain survey phenomena after the fact (without being tested), the interdisciplinary work done in CASM is very interesting and continues to contribute to further insight in human cognition as well as to improved survey practice.

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