
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Review of the Effects of Textual Enhancement on Second Language Learning

Tiantian Guo

College of Foreign Languages, Ocean University of China, Qingdao, China

Corresponding Author: Tiantian Guo, **E-mail:** fredaguotiantian@163.com

ABSTRACT

Textual enhancement refers to techniques for making target linguistic features in a text more perceptually salient. Textual enhancement has been frequently studied as a promising instructional method for promoting language learning. This paper reviewed studies on the role of textual enhancement in terms of vocabulary and grammar learning, second language speaking, writing, reading, and pragmatic competence. In addition, this paper also pointed out the problems of current research and the direction of future research. To prove the effectiveness of second language learning, researchers should further explore the effects of textual enhancement in various language environments.

KEYWORDS

Input enhancement; textual enhancement; second language learning; language teaching

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 10 January 2023

PUBLISHED: 17 January 2023

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.1.15

1. Introduction

Input enhancement refers to the techniques that make learners focus on the particular properties of the input (Smith, 1993). Rutherford & Smith (1985) initially proposed many input enhancement techniques, including input flood, textual enhancement, and grammatical consciousness-raising. Textual enhancement is one of the most important techniques of input enhancement, which requires the manipulation of target linguistic forms in the input with different techniques. Textual enhancement can increase the saliency of the target forms. Therefore, it can direct the learners' attention to the target and facilitate learning. Textual enhancement is made by using one or more typographical techniques like boldfacing, italicizing, underlying, coloring, enlarging the font size, and changing the font type to draw students' attention to a particular form. Previous studies have examined the effectiveness of textual enhancement in promoting target language learning. The results were different. Many researchers indicated that textual enhancement could facilitate language learning, but other studies found no positive effect of textual enhancement. For instance, Izumi (2002) examined the effect of textual enhancement. Students in the experimental group received enhanced texts, whereas students in the control group were exposed to unenhanced texts. The results indicated that textual enhancement has no significant effect on learning.

2. Literature review

2.1 Textual enhancement and vocabulary learning

Previous studies found that compared with nonenhanced inputs, enhanced inputs were more effective for vocabulary learning.

Wang & Wang (2009) compared the effectiveness of the output task, glossing, and textual enhancement on the acquisition of vocabulary. The results indicated that the output task has a significant role, whereas the textual enhancement and glossing have no facilitative effect in general.

Nahavandi & Mukundan (2014) examined the role of textual enhancement on vocabulary intake among Iranian elementary EFL learners. Students in the experimental group were provided with a reading text with highlighted words, while the students in the

control group were exposed to unenhanced text. The findings suggest that students in the experimental group perform better than the students in the control group. Ghafouri & Masoomi (2016) also attempted to examine the effect of textual enhancement on vocabulary acquisition, but they focused on Iranian university students. The findings indicated that textual enhancement could promote vocabulary acquisition.

Previous studies examined the effect of textual enhancement on vocabulary learning. The results showed that textual enhancement is important in the acquisition of single words. Therefore, some studies attempt to explore the effectiveness of textual enhancement in collocation learning. Collocations were defined differently depending on the research interests of research. Generally, collocations can be habitually co-occurring lexical partnerships with relative transparency of meaning that contribute to L2 fluency (Henriksen, 2013). In broader terms, collocations belong to formulaic sequences (Schmitt, 2010).

Zhou & Lu (2010) attempted to explore the role of textual enhancement in the learning of English collocation. The results showed that the textual enhancement had a significant effect on the acquisition of the form of collocation, but it had a significant effect on the learning of the meaning of collocation.

Szudarski & Carter (2016) also investigated the effect of textual enhancement on the acquisition of verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. The participants were assigned to two experimental groups and a control group. Two kinds of instruction in the experimental groups are input flood only and input flood plus textual enhancement. The findings suggested that the input flood plus textual enhancement can only improve the learning of collocation at the level of form recall and form recognition.

Fazlali & Shahini (2019) explore the role of textual enhancement in promoting grammatical and lexical collocation among Iranian EFL learners. The results indicated that textual enhancement cannot influence the learning of grammatical collocation knowledge, but it had a significant effect on facilitating the learning of lexical collocation knowledge.

Fang & Jiang (2020) examined the effect of textual enhancement in the acquisition of collocations of intermediate learners. The results showed that textual enhancement could improve learners' acquisition of collocations, and the results also indicated that the effectiveness of textual enhancement does not change along with semantic transparency.

2.2 Textual enhancement and grammar learning

Simard (2009) examined the effect of textual enhancement on the intake of plural markers in English by French-speaking students. The students were assigned to eight experimental groups. In each experimental group, the students were required to read a text which has different textual enhancement formats. The results revealed that different formats of textual enhancement had different impacts on students' learning.

Cho (2010) examined the role of textual enhancement in the acquisition of English present perfect. The results showed that it could only affect students' receptive knowledge of the target grammar form but not their productivity.

Ge (2010) explored the effect of textual enhancement on the learning of English relative clauses among Chinese learners. The findings showed that students exposed to enhanced text could learn target structure better than students not provided with the enhanced text.

Torkabada & Fazilatfarb (2014) compared the effects of textual enhancement and input processing as two types of experimental conditions versus traditional instruction in the learning of present and past simple tenses. In the textual enhancement condition, the students were exposed to texts involving bolded new tense words. In the control group, students did not provide any treatment. The results indicated that the experimental condition was effective in promoting grammar learning.

Jabbarpoor & Tajeddin (2013) investigated the effectiveness of textual enhancement on the learning of English subjunctive mood. Participants were randomly assigned into three groups: one control group and two experimental groups. Participants in one experimental group were provided with textual-enhanced text, and students in another experiment group were exposed to an output task. The results indicated that textual enhancement could promote participants' learning.

Jahan & Kormos (2015) attempt to explore the impact of textual enhancement on the learning of "be going to" construction. The results showed that students who were exposed to the enhanced text performed better in the knowledge of the target grammar and its use of it.

Yang (2016) examined the role of textual enhancement, input flood, and textual enhancement plus input flood in the learning of English manner adverbs among Chinese learners. The results indicated that the three types of input enhancement could promote learning.

Arani & Yazdanimoghaddam (2016) attempts to explore the influence of textual enhancement and input flooding on EFL learners' syntactic development. The participants in the first group received an input text in which the target structure was flooded. And participants in the second group were exposed to a reading passage in which the structure was enhanced. And the third group was provided with a text with a combination of input flood and textual enhancement. And the target structure is three adjective clauses and four verb prepositions. The results showed that textual enhancement and input flooding has a significant effect on the recognition and production of the target structure.

Bakhshandeh & Jafari (2018) compared the effectiveness of textual enhancement and explicit instruction on simple present and simple past passive voices of Iranian lower-intermediate EFL learners. The findings suggest that explicit instruction is better at promoting the learning of passive voice than textual enhancement.

Meguro (2019) attempts to explore the effect of textual enhancement on grammar learning. The results indicated that the enhanced text could only promote the learning of one type of tag question and have no significant effect on reading comprehension.

Lee (2020) investigated the effect of two types of textual enhancement on the learning of third-person singular forms of Japanese university students. The findings suggest that textual enhancement is slightly effective, and the results also showed that the effect of textual enhancement can be improved by combining it with teaching students effective learning strategies.

In conclusion, previous studies examined the effects of textual enhancement on learning different target grammar forms. These studies can provide insights for teachers to adopt textual enhancement in teaching grammar knowledge. And future studies can focus on the target grammar with relatively higher communicative value.

2.3 Textual enhancement and speaking

Hazrativand (2012) attempts to find out whether the enhanced text can facilitate students to use the past tense form of English more accurately. The findings suggested that textual enhancement can improve learners' accuracy in their oral production.

2.4 Textual enhancement and writing

Xin (2017) explored the role of textual enhancement in facilitating grammar learning in continuation writing. Continuation writing can combine reading and writing, and students write after reading the input text. Students in the experimental group were exposed to enhanced text, and students in the control group were not provided with the unenhanced text. The results revealed that textual enhancement can improve learners' noticing of the target forms.

Safdari (2019) investigated the effect of textual enhancement on EFL learners' writing. Students in the experimental group were exposed to the enhanced target grammar as the present simple and continuous tenses were enhanced through various techniques such as underlining, boldfacing, and italicization. The students in the control group were provided with the same and unenhanced text. The findings suggested that textual enhancement has a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing.

Qiu & Wang (2022) explored the role of textual enhancement in learners' performance in the continuation writing task. The participants were divided into two groups: one experimental group and a control group. The participants in the experimental group received the enhanced text, but the participants in the control group were exposed to unenhanced text for the continuation writing task. The findings revealed that textual enhancement can improve learners' accuracy, but it has no significant effect on learners' complexity and fluency in their writing performance.

2.5 Textual enhancement and reading

Leow (2001) found that textual enhancement has no significant effect on students' comprehension and intake. Lee (2007) found that textual enhancement can promote the acquisition of the target forms while it has an unfavorable effect on meaning comprehension.

Arani & Yazdanimoghaddam (2016) investigated the effect of textual enhancement on EFL learners' syntactic development. The results indicated that textual enhancement can have significant effects on learners' syntactic development. And the results also indicated that the combination of textual enhancement and input flooding can have a better effect on learning.

Zeng & Zhang (2017) investigated the effectiveness of textual enhancement on anaphor resolution and reading comprehension among Chinese EFL learners. The results revealed that textual enhancement improves learners' anaphora resolution and promotes their reading comprehension.

2.6 Textual enhancement and pragmatic competence

Compared to areas such as vocabulary or grammar, the effectiveness of textual enhancement on learners' pragmatic competence has been explored far less.

Tajeddind & Pezeshki (2014) examined the effect of textual enhancement on the acquisition of politeness markers. The results indicated that textual enhancement can improve students' comprehension of politeness markers.

Torkaman & Mohamadi (2018) compared the effect of textual enhancement and elaboration on the learning of discourse markers. The results showed that students in the elaboration groups performed better. And the results also indicated that female students outperformed the enhancement group. And the findings provide insights into learning discourse markers. In conclusion, fewer studies have examined the efficacy of textual enhancement on pragmatic competence. Future research should attempt to address this ignored issue.

To date, few papers reviewed the effect of textual enhancement on second language learning. Lee & Huang (2008) conducted a meta-analysis that included 16 studies to investigate the effect of textual enhancement on grammar learning. They reported that students exposed to enhancement-embedded texts performed better than those who were provided with an enhancement text. And the results also indicated that there is publication bias in this research domain. However, Lee & Huang's (2008) meta-analysis only focused on the effect of textual enhancement on grammar learning. And since 2012, the research of textual enhancement was not limited to grammar learning; it has also focused on other fields such as pragmatics, vocabulary, reading, and writing. And Lee & Huang's (2008) meta-analysis only includes the studies that appeared between the years 1981 and 2006. Therefore, there is a need for a larger-scale examination of the effect of textual enhancement on second language learning. This paper extended previous work by reviewing recent studies concerning the effects of textual enhancement on second language learning conducted since 2000. It is hoped that the current literature can provide insights into textual enhancement in learning.

3. Conclusion

This paper reviewed the effects of textual enhancement on second language learning. Although many studies were conducted to examine the role of textual enhancement, these studies have some limitations. Firstly, most studies choose college students or high school students as participants. Fewer studies paid attention to elementary students. Secondly, most studies examined English as the target second language. Finally, most studies took grammar as the target knowledge. Fewer studies focused on the effect of textual enhancement on speaking and pragmatic knowledge learning. In the future, researchers could choose elementary school students as participants as they are more sensitive to textual enhancement because of image thinking. And the role of textual enhancement in the second language learning of elementary school students needs further exploration. Moreover, other second languages should be explored. In addition, future studies need to discuss the effects of textual enhancement on these factors in second language learning.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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