SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: EXPLORING THE NOTICING HYPOTHESIS IN NOUN PHRASES THROUGH TEXTUAL ENHANCEMENT

Sumaira Malik[1], Dr. Azhar Pervaiz[2]

Abstract

A noun phrase is necessary for correct sentence formation and crucial for effective communication. Textual enhancement falls within the category of input enhancement. Textual enhancement involves modifying text visually so that learners pay more attention towards form. The objective of this study is to investigate the role of bolding and italicizing in noun phrases learning among students of a second language. This study is constrained by the utilization of two methods of textual enhancement. Data was collected through convenience sampling. Thirty students were selected for testing textual enhancement in an experimental study. Students were divided into three groups: bold-faced group, italicized group and unenhanced group. Each group has ten students. The bold-faced group was exposed to bold textual enhancement. The italicised group was exposed to italic textual enhancement and control group received traditional material without enhancement. Pre-test and Post-test design is used to assess the performance of students. The pre-test is used to check the knowledge of students before intervention whereas the post-test shows improvement in performance after an intervention. Data analysis includes calculating mean scores of pre-test and post-test and their variation. The pre-test mean score of the bold-faced group (n=10) is 5 and the post-test mean score is 8. Italicized group (n=10) pretest score is 5 and post-test mean score is 7. The unenhanced group (n=10) pre-test mean score was 5 and after post post-test mean score was 6. Results show that students in the bold group perform better than students in the italicized group. The significance of the study lies in designing instructional materials that maximize learners' noticing of specific language forms.

Keywords: Textual enhancement, noun phrase acquisition, pre-test and post-test design, instructional designs.

Introduction

Grammar of the target language is an important area of second language acquisition. Students must learn the grammar of a second language do not cram grammatical rules, but rather learn them in a meaningful context. Language edifice is built on noun phrases. A noun phrase is defined as a group of words linked with the head noun as a post-modifier or pre-modifier. Noun phrases are considered difficult grammatical structures to acquire by second language learners. Students and teachers know that the acquisition and mastery of noun phrases in a second language is difficult. It is a common tendency for students to pay more attention to content rather than form.

The form-focused instruction focuses on grammar and vocabulary with meaningful texts, and textual enhancement is a specific type of form-focused instruction. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) suggested that textual enhancement alone is not effective. Textual enhancement can be made effective by giving a brief explanation about target forms, incorporating it into communicative tasks. Han et al. (2008) stated that we can get the benefit of textual enhancement when we have prior knowledge of target forms.

[1] MPhil Scholar, Dptt. of English, University of Sargodha, Pakistan [msumaira180@gmail.com]

[2] Assistant Professor, Dptt. of English, University of Sargodha, Pakistan [azhar.pervaiz@uos.edu.pk]

In formal instruction, learners are typically taught the basic rules for forming noun phrases in English, such as the use of articles, adjectives, and prepositional phrases. They may also learn about noun phrases. Practice exercises, such as sentence completion and writing prompts, can help reinforce these concepts. Similarly, immersion in an English-speaking environment, such as living in an English-speaking country or attending an English-language school, can also be effective in learning noun phrases. By being exposed to English in everyday situations, learners can pick up the nuances of English noun phrases through observation and practice.

The focus of this research is on the development of one grammatical category, and that is a noun phrase. The complexity of noun phrases develops over time according to changes in classes. Noun phrase complexity is studied under pre-modification (a **white** dog) and post-modification (permission **to drink water**). Mastery of noun phrases is necessary for mature academic writing.

Students know the organisation of noun phrases in a second language, but some commit errors while using them. Noun phrases are complex and are acquired later. Durrant et al., (2021) development of noun phrase complexity is a marker of the syntactic development of children in writing skills. Noun phrase complexity develops in a later stage (Ravid & Berman, 2010). Initially, researchers focus on the complexity of verb phrases. Now, Researchers focus on the complexity of noun phrases. Disordering, misinformation, omission and addition are common errors committed by students while using noun phrases. Biber et al. 1999 stated that noun phrase complexity differs across written genres. Sophisticated language has noun phrase complexity. This study aims to make students aware of noun phrases and how they can acquire them through textual enhancement.

The Input Enhancement Framework focuses on how linguistic input can be modified or highlighted to draw learners' attention to specific linguistic features. Smith (1991, 1993) proposed an input enhancement hypothesis. Textual enhancement falls within the category of input enhancement. Textual enhancement involves modifying text visually so that learners pay more attention towards the form.

Textual enhancement refers to the use of visual cues, such as bolding or italics, applied to noun phrases within instructional materials to draw learners' attention to specific linguistic features. When input repeats linguistic form, again and again, learners acquire it naturally on a conscious level. Second language learners can not learn linguistic items without consciously noticing the input, as stated by Schmidt (1990). There are different techniques to make a second language form apparent, and it will capture the learner's attention better. The Input Enhancement Framework focuses on how linguistic input can be modified or highlighted to draw learners' attention to specific linguistic features.

Noun phrase learning is operationally defined as the ability of learners to recognise, identify, and understand noun phrases within the context of provided textual materials. It encompasses both the receptive (recognition) and productive (use) aspects of noun phrase knowledge.

The control group in this study is operationally defined as the group of participants who receive traditional language instruction without the application of any form of textual

enhancement. They serve as a baseline comparison for evaluating the impact of textual enhancement on noun phrase learning.

The noticing hypothesis refers to the cognitive process by which learners become consciously aware of the enhanced noun phrases in the instructional materials. It involves the learner's ability to perceive and cognitively process the visually highlighted noun phrases.

It examines the effectiveness of textual enhancement as a pedagogical tool, potentially influencing the integration of enhanced text in teaching materials. It explores individual differences in noticing noun phrases, facilitating the tailoring of teaching methods to diverse learner profiles. Connects theories from linguistics, cognitive psychology, and education, contributing to a holistic understanding of cognitive processes in language learning. Potential application in the creation of enhanced language learning materials, apps, and resources for a broader audience.

Literature Review

The acquisition of noun phrases in a second language involves several stages, starting with the recognition and production of individual words and progressing to the ability to use them in grammatically correct phrases and sentences. At the early stages of acquisition, students may rely on rote memorisation of individual words and phrases; however, they begin to understand the underlying rules and structures of the language and become more proficient.

One critical factor that influences the acquisition of noun phrases is the learners' native language. Students who come from languages that are similar in structure to the target language may find it easier to acquire noun phrases than those from languages that are structurally different. Meisel (2011) quoted that there is a difference between the SLA of children and adults. A child spends less time with a second language, whereas an adult spends years in a second language. Exposure to rich and varied input encompassing different types of noun phrases and their usage in context can enhance learners' ability to acquire them. Explicit instruction and practice in using noun phrases can help learners develop appropriate usage of phrases.

A learner cannot grasp linguistic features unless they consciously notice the input. When input repeats a linguistic form, learners acquire it naturally on a conscious level. Schmidt (1995) stated that learning a language becomes effective through noticing and elaborated that when a learner receives input, and uses his subjective experience simultaneously in the noticing technique, it facilitates language learning. The noticing hypothesis is a theory within second-language acquisition proposed by Schmidt (1990) and is considered a compromise between the grammatical approach and the communicative approach in language learning.

Noticing is a technique used to highlight grammatical forms in a text so that learners pay attention to them and students acquire noun phrases. Noticing is an important technique in second language acquisition. Schmidt (1994) stated that noticing converts input to intake for learning a second language (p.17). Noticing has many techniques. Ayiewbey, S. (2013) studied the effects of textual enhancement on learning the English past tense, indicating that bold textual enhancement produces a better result than an italicized group. When input

repeats linguistic form, learners acquire it naturally on a conscious level. According to Cross (2002), students notice language form in input through underlining, italics, bolding and colouring.

Attention and awareness are necessary for learning a second language. When we increase the saliency of target forms, it triggers the attention of students and promotes noticing of second language features. Simard (2009) and Takahashi (2015) stated that grammatical and linguistic forms can be acquired better by using attention and noticing. Noticing is an effective technique in second language learning (Schmidt, 1995). Different textual enhancements are effective in noticing target forms, but bolding and underlining are more effective in triggering the noticing of that form.

A noun phrase has a noun with an article, determiner or adjective. Ba'dulu (2008) defined a noun phrase as a group of words with a noun as its head. Similarly, Nguyen (2010) stated that a noun phrase has nouns, pronouns, and modifiers, including adjectives, possessive adjectives, adjective clauses, determiners, preposition phrases and adverbs.

Mango	**Noun**
Some Mango	has a determiner and noun
Some red cherries	have determiners, adjectives and noun
Some red cherries that Sarah wants to eat	have a determiner, adjective,

The first part is the head of the noun phrase. The head of the noun phrase consists of a noun, adjective, pronoun, genitive phrase and enumerator.

For example,

An adjective,	the red
Genitive phase	Sarah's
An enumerator	of all three
A noun	the bus
A pronoun	herself

The second part is a pre-modifier. Pre-modifiers consist of determiners, adjectives, nouns, enumerators, adverbs and genitive phases. For example,

Determiners, for example,	that evening
Adjective,	example: old coat
Noun,	example: a white cat
Enumerator,	example: three ships
Adverb	example: double the amount
Genitive phase	example: Sarah's house

Post modifiers are the third part of noun phrases. For example:

Adjective	example: something awkward
Adverb	example: a clean river nearby
Preposition phrase	example: a small man with a red hat
Relative clause	example: the girl that gave you a pen yesterday
Non-finite clauses	example: the doctors to be watched during the duty

Noun phrase functions as subject, object and or complement.

Noun phrase as a subject

NP= S + P+ C

Example: The zoo was quite full
Noun phrase as an object
NP= S + P+ O
Example: We have bought a car.
Noun phrase as a complement.
NP= S + P+ C
Example: He has a problem finding his pen.
Noun phrase performs four functions (Thomas, 2005), including subject, complement, premodifier and object. Similarly, a noun phrase performs three functions, including an oppositive, a prepositional complement and an adverbial (Adebileje, 2016).

Subject	Ex: The beautiful apartment is for sale.
Direct object	Ex: He played cricket.
Indirect object	Ex: Give her the car.
Subject complement	Ex: I will become an English teacher.
Object complement	Ex: Pizza makes Sarah happy.
Complement of a preposition	Ex: The storm happened five days ago.

Various studies highlighted the positive role of textual enhancement in learning a second language. Meguro, Y. (2019) researched the role of textual enhancement in grammar learning, reading comprehension, and tag questions, not compromising reading comprehension. Moreover, Chung & Révész (2021) studied the effect of textual enhancement using post-reading tasks for enhancing grammatical development. It was performed on children, and findings indicated that textual enhancement has a positive role in developing third-person singular morphemes –s. Captioning in the target language improves the acquisition of grammatical structures.

Textual enhancement has played a positive role in acquiring a second language. Hassani et al. (2015) researched the role of noticing and input enhancement on the acquisition of English prepositions, indicating that input enhancement and noticing have a positive impact on the acquisition of English prepositions. Likewise, noticing through input enhancement affects the learning of the conditionals (Rashtchi & Gharanli, 2010). The Enhanced group (Experimental group) received a set of materials in which the If-clauses were enhanced through enlargement and different combinations of bolding, italics, and underlining; whereas, the Unenhanced group (Control group) received the same set of texts with no enhancement on If-clauses. Input enhancement helped the participants in the experimental group to learn the conditional sentences. Furthermore, Cintrón et al. (2021) investigated textual enhancement and captions in L2 grammar and vocabulary.

The acquisition of noun phrases in a second language is a complex process that involves multiple factors, including the learners' background, exposure to input, and instruction. With consistent exposure and practice, learners can develop their skills in using noun phrases and become more proficient in the target language. Self-study materials, such as textbooks, online courses, and language-learning apps, can also provide a structured approach to learning noun phrases in English. These resources often include explanations

of grammar rules, sample sentences, and interactive exercises to help learners practice their skills.

Mature academic writing demands the complexity of noun phrases. A student learns a noun phrase step by step, and complexity is introduced step by step. The curriculum is designed keeping in view the difficulty level, and students acquire it gradually. The complexity of noun phrases develops from higher schools onwards. Post-modification becomes complex and includes prepositional as well as relative clauses. The writing skills of students mature and accurate over time. The curriculum introduces noun phrase complexity at different stages.

This research is going to fill the research gap of the positive effect of textual enhancement in the context of Pakistan, where students are learning English as a second language. Students are adults, and their native language is Punjabi. Textual enhancement does not hinder comprehension while focusing on form.

Objectives of Research

The following are the objectives of this research:

- To investigate the role of textual enhancement in the learning of noun phrases among students of a second language
- To investigate the role of bolding and italicising in learning noun phrases among students of a second language

Research Question

Whether or not textual enhancement promotes the learning of noun phrases among students of a second language

Whether or not bolding and italicising play a role in learning noun phrases among students of a second language.

Research Methodology

Hypothesis:

The use of textual enhancement in instructional materials will improve the performance of students in the acquisition of noun phrases compared to traditional enhancement methods. Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the acquisition of noun phrases between students exposed to textual enhancement in instructional materials and students exposed to traditional enhancement methods.

Materials and Methods

The sample size was thirty, and participants were selected from the University of Sargodha. Participants' age lies between nineteen to twenty-one years. The researcher developed reading material, which was a short story incorporating noun phrases as the targeted form. The difficulty level of a short story is matched with the textbooks of students. The researcher also developed two tests, one a pre-test and the other a post-test. Each test has ten questions to identify noun phrases in the sentences. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) recommendations are considered for incorporating textual enhancement.

Procedure

The researcher told the participants that the study aims to investigate the effect of textual enhancement on the acquisition of noun phrases. The Pre-test was distributed among the participants. The pre-test has ten items, and students have to underline the noun phrase. The pre-test measured the overall performance of students in the target language in forming

noun phrases before intervention. In the next step, students were given an unenhanced version of the reading material. The researcher helped them with reading comprehension of short stories. After one day, the researcher divided the students into three groups. Two groups were experimental, and one was the control group. One experimental group was exposed to bolding, and the second was exposed to italicised forms of noun phrases. After the third reading, participants were given a second test, that is, a post-test. It was intended to measure participants' grasp of noun phrases due to textual enhancement. The students are exposed to instructional materials with textual enhancement.

Results

After performing the pre-test and post-test, the scores of students in each group are calculated. Table 1 shows the average scores of each group. There is a difference between the performance of students in the pre-test and post-test. Figure 1 shows the variation between the pre-test and post-test.

Groups	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean
Bold-faced group (n=10)	5	8
Italicised group (n=10)	6	7
Unenhanced group (n=10)	5	6

Table 1: *Average scores of the participants in the three groups*
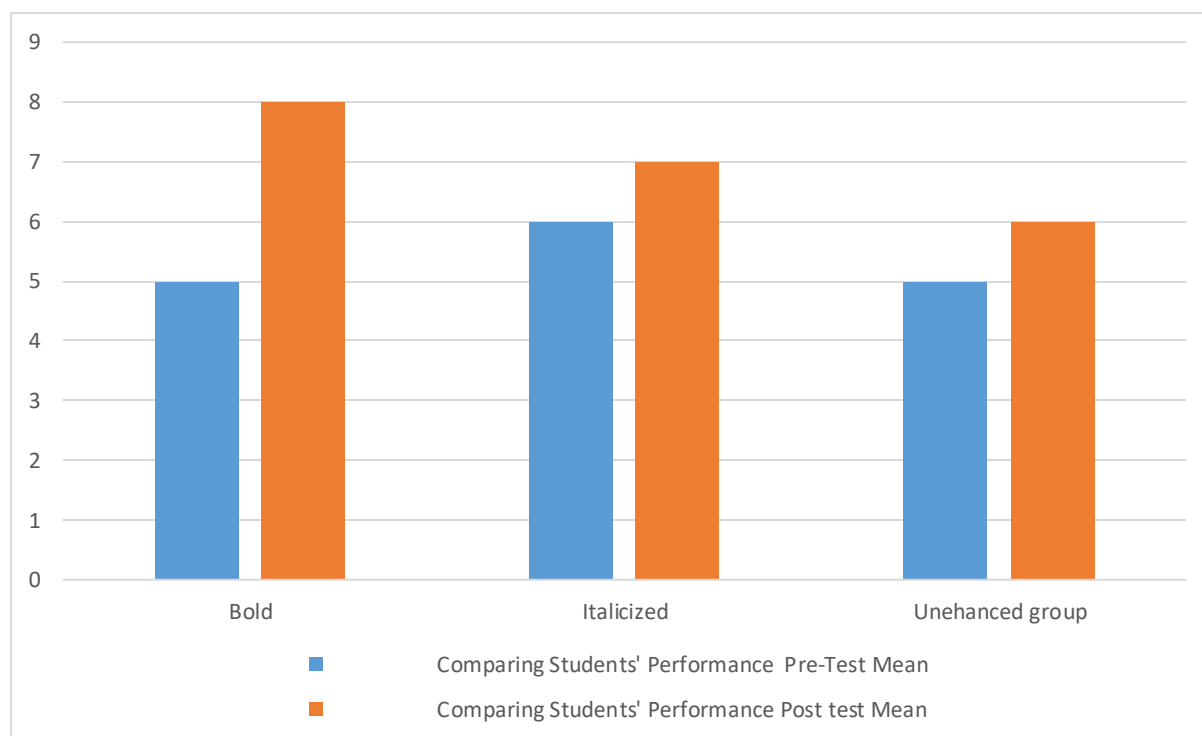
Discussion

Findings show that textual enhancement affects the performance of students in acquiring noun phrases. Bold-faced and italicised groups perform better in identifying noun phrases as compared to unenhanced groups. The bold-faced group has an average mean score of 5 in a pre-test and turned into 8 in the post-test. The pre-test of the italicised group has an average mean score of 6 in a pre-test and is 7 in the post-test, indicating improvement in performance of both groups. Both groups were able to identify noun phrases. It shows that bolding and italicising techniques of textual enhancement help students learn syntactic forms.

Conclusion

In short, textual enhancement increases the acquisition of noun phrases. Bold-faced textual enhancement gives better results than italicised textual enhancement. Noun phrase builds better sentences and are helpful for effective communication. This research was conducted to check the role of textual enhancement on noun phrase acquisition. The objective of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of employing textual enhancement as a pedagogical approach in noun phrase acquisition.

Pre-test and post-test designs are selected to compare the learning outcomes of a group of participants who received instructional materials with textual enhancement to a group that received traditional instruction without such enhancements. The results demonstrate the positive impact of textual enhancement on the acquisition of noun phrases. The experimental group, exposed to instructional materials with bolding or italicising noun phrases, showed greater improvement in their proficiency compared to the group receiving traditional instruction.

The findings highlight the importance of incorporating textual enhancement techniques into language instruction to enhance learners' understanding and acquisition of noun phrases. By drawing learners' attention to specific linguistic features through techniques like bold or italicised text, underlining, colour coding, and glossing, instructors can facilitate the identification and comprehension of noun phrases, ultimately improving learners' overall language proficiency.

Language educators and curriculum designers can use textual enhancement in language instruction, as it is effective in learning noun phrases. They can use these techniques in designing instructional materials and classroom activities. Teachers can create a more engaging and effective learning environment for learners, fostering their acquisition and mastery of noun phrases.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the area of second language acquisition by utilising techniques of textual enhancement. Results indicated a positive impact on the acquisition of noun phrases by applying textual enhancement techniques. Teachers should incorporate these techniques into language instruction so that students perform well in grammar. Noun phrase acquisition enhances the communicative competence of students in a second language. Further research can be conducted to explore the effects of different types of textual enhancement and their role in improving the performance of students.

Suggestions

There are other types of textual enhancement. Further research can be conducted with other techniques.

Underlining:

We use it to underline words or phrases in a text. It is used as a visual cue. Students notice linguistic items.

Colour Coding:

Different colours can be used to make text appear different. It captures the attention of students and helps them recognise words.

Glossing:

Glossing gives explanations, translations and definitions of difficult words. These are written above or below the text and are helpful in learners' comprehension and vocabulary.

Parentheses or Brackets:

The researcher provides additional information, explanations or clarification in brackets. It gives contextual information to students.

Highlighted Examples:

Researchers can use this technique of textual enhancement to improve the performance of students.

Sentence Reordering:

Researchers can rearrange paragraphs or sentences and encourage students to analyse language and its rules.

It can be used in curriculum and syllabus design.

Further research can be conducted keeping in view the gender perspective.

Recommendations:

Integrate Textual Enhancement techniques into language teaching methodologies, emphasising the importance of visual cues for enhancing noun phrase acquisition.

Develop training programs for language educators to incorporate Textual Enhancement effectively, ensuring they can create an optimal learning environment for noun phrase acquisition.

Explore the integration of technology, such as apps and online platforms, to deliver Textual Enhancement, making language learning more engaging and accessible.

Encourage the exploration of various Textual Enhancement techniques (e.g., bolding, italics, underlining) to understand their relative effectiveness in different contexts.

Contribute to the development of guidelines for curriculum designers, emphasising the incorporation of Textual Enhancement in language learning materials for noun phrase instruction.

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