

Boosting ESL Learners' Vocabulary Intake: The Role of Typographic Enhancements in Language Classroom

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This study investigates the efficacy of typographic enhancement (TE) in facilitating formulaic language (FL) acquisition among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Given the crucial role of FL in daily conversations and its pragmatic values, this research focuses on whether TE strategies in ESL/EFL learning environments can improve the intake of formulaic sequences (FS) in learners with low proficiency. The study adopts a quasi-experimental design, involving two groups of university students. The experimental group, consisting of thirty students, interacted with reading passages featuring highlighted and bolded FS, while a control group of twenty-six students received no typographic treatment. The methodology encompassed a pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test. These instruments were validated by experts and pilot-tested to ensure clarity and appropriate difficulty level. Target vocabularies, selected from students' coursebooks and the frequency of words were assessed using the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Data were collected over eight weeks in an English course at a Malaysian public tertiary institution. Pre-test scores were first analyzed using analysis of variance to evaluate initial group differences, followed by multivariate analysis of post-test and delayed post-test scores. The results reveal that typographic enhancement (TE) has a small to medium positive short-term impact on the intake of target formulaic sequences (FS) among low-proficiency learners. While the statistical analysis indicates significant short-term improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group, the long-term efficacy of TE remains inconclusive, with no significant long-term improvement observed. This limitation points to the necessity for extended research, ideally involving larger participants to validate these findings. Additionally, the study suggests integrating qualitative methods, such as interviews, to further enrich the understanding of TE's long-term effects in ESL/EFL pedagogy. In short, the findings revealed that the effectiveness of TE technique when employed in isolation was effective in the short-term, with small to medium effect sizes, in enhancing the intake of the target FL when compared to no enhancement given to the learners in their reading texts. It contributes significantly to the understanding of TE's isolated impact, particularly in a non-conflated experimental design.