

Enhancing nothing? The efficacy of textual enhancement in fostering the learning and the unlearning of two syntactic properties of Spanish and Italian

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Abstract

This study investigates the differential effects of Textual Enhancement (TE) on the learning and unlearning of two syntactic structures in Spanish – Prepositional Accusative (PA) and Pre-possessive Determiner Article (PPDA) – by Italian-speaking learners of Spanish (ISLS). 57 ISLS were divided into two experimental groups: group A read 5 texts with TE on PA – the feature to be learned - and group B read the same 5 texts with TE on PPDA – the feature to be unlearned -. The participants took a timed grammatical judgment task three times, and their results in this were compared with those of Della Putta (2016), a study symmetrical to the present in which the same teaching intervention and experimental conditions were adopted with Spanish-speaking learners of Italian, whose task was to unlearn PA and to learn PPDA. Overall, the comparison revealed similar, weak effects of TE, although some differences in its efficacy were found, and these are discussed and theoretically motivated.