

**NOTICING GRAMMAR IN INPUT:  
AN EFFECT OF L2 INSTRUCTION  
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**Abstract**

This study investigates the efficacy of instructional modifications on both L2 learners' noticing and recall of targeted grammatical structures, and on their comprehension of text content. Seventeen American university students enrolled in low Intermediate L2 French class participated in this study. Subjects were randomly assigned to two conditions: Non-modified text and modified text. Data were collected through comprehension and multiple-choice recall tasks. A significant difference was found for input modification on L2 learners' recall of grammatical structures and their comprehension of text content. The findings provide empirical evidence that supports the importance of exposing L2 learners to enhanced modified reading materials and to modified input to facilitate recall of linguistic structures and reading comprehension. Pedagogical implications of this study will be addressed at the end of this paper.

**1. Theoretical Evidence**

The claim that second language (L2) acquisition requires learners' noticing, and attention to L2 linguistic features (Schmidt, 1990, 1993) is the empirical and theoretical basis for the need of instructional modifications such as textual manipulation. According to research, this instructional modification is argued to be important because it helps learners notice, recognize, recall linguistic and grammatical forms, and retain them longer. Most importantly, it makes the input more comprehensible to L2 learners (Leow, 1997). According to Krashen (1982,

1985), comprehensibility of input provides more linguistic information to the learners' developing linguistic system. Because learners are not overloaded with complicated input, they are able to attend to grammatical structures that may not be part of their developing grammars. This comprehensibility of the input also facilitates and enhances better comprehension of a text content, in that learners are able to get more passage information from the modified and enhanced input (Leow, 1993, 1997).

Many theoretical approaches to the role of attention to formal features in the input in second language acquisition have been advanced. Among these are "consciousness-raising" by Sharwood Smith (1981); "focus on form" approach by Long (1991); 'noticing hypothesis' by Schmidt (1990, 1993); "model of input processing" by Tomlin and Villa (1994); and 'model of the relationship between attention and memory' by Robinson (1995). The underlying claim of all these theoretical approaches is that "some form of attention is crucial in promoting further processing of grammatical information in adult learners' L2 development" (Leow 1997, p.152).

Focus on the formal characteristics of language can be initiated not only by providing negative feedback in the learner output, but also by making more salient grammatical forms in the input. (Sharwood Smith, 1993). In written mode, among the techniques employed to enhance input in written text include input modification and manipulation which have been given much importance and have been examined by various researchers (*e.g.*, Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, & Doughty, 1995; Leow 1993, 1995; Shook 1990, 1994 ). Input enhancement defined by Leow (1997):

as attempts to draw L2 learners' attention to targeted forms in the input by highlighting or making salient these forms through the use of typographic manipulation (*e.g.*, larger type sizes and different typefaces) and typographic cues, (*e.g.*, bolding, colour shading and coding, underlining, and uppercasing etc.). (p.167)

Another type of textual manipulation advanced by Leow (1997) is lexical, phonological or syntactic simplification and modification. Further types of input enhancement are marginal glosses, multiple-choice marginal glosses (Watanabe 1997).

## 2. Review of Research Studies

A review of recent literature on instructional modifications reflects a considerable body of research that has addressed the effects of input modification and manipulation on various L2 (e.g., English, French and Spanish) learners' acquisition and retention of grammatical forms, and their comprehension of text content. (e.g., Jourdenais *et al.*, 1995; Leow, 1993, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Shook, 1990, 1994; VanPattern, 1990; Watanabe, 1997; White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, 1991, *etc.*). For instance, in the context of English, among the studies conducted is White *et al.*'s study (1991) that investigated the effect of input enhancement on L2 learners' accuracy in question formation, that involved grade six ESL francophone learners in two different conditions (input enhancement condition and uninstructed condition). Findings of this study revealed that learners who were exposed to the input enhancement activities significantly outperformed the uninstructed learners. Another study directed to L2 English is Watanabe's (1997) that investigated the effects of different ways of input modification namely appositives, single and multiple-choice marginal glosses on ESL Japanese-speaking learners processing of input, their initial learning, and their retention of the meaning of target words in the text. The results of this study indicated that learners exposed to more than one type of input modification performed significantly better than the ones exposed to non-modified input.

In the areas of L2 French, one study worth mentioning is by Redouane (2004) which investigated the impact of input enhancement and text length on L2 French learners' comprehension of text content and recall and retention of the subjunctive. Findings of this study reveal a significant difference between subjects who were exposed to non-enhanced long text and those exposed to enhanced short text. Subjects

exposed to input enhancement and simplification of text length achieved higher comprehension of the content and recognized more subjunctive forms contained in the written text than those who did not receive this kind of input enhancement.

Among the research studies directed to Spanish, notable are Leow's (1993) study involving 137 college-level students, and his (1995) study involving 213 students in the first and fourth semester levels. Both studies looked at the effectiveness of input simplification on adult L2 Spanish learners' intake of Spanish present perfect and subjunctive forms in both written and aural modes. In both studies, students were assigned to one of the four conditions (a simplified or unsimplified text with the present perfect form, and a simplified or unsimplified text with the subjunctive) and were exposed to written and aural input. No significant effect of textual manipulation was found in both studies. According to Leow (1997b):

reducing learners' cognitive demands to processing for meaning through simplification did not produce any significant increase in their intake of the linguistic items contained in the input in either mode. (153)

Also, in Leow's (1997b) study involving 84 native speakers of English enrolled in the second semester of Spanish study, and investigating the effects of both written input enhancement and text length on these L2 learners' comprehension of text content and their intake of impersonal imperative Spanish forms, there was evidence supporting the effectiveness of text length on reading comprehension but not on intake of formal structures. However, there was no significant main effect for input enhancement on either comprehension of the text or intake of grammatical structures. Similarly, Shook in his (1990) study found no significant difference between the three groups' performances on a free written recall task that was designed to measure learners' comprehension of the text content.

Contrary to these findings, Shook, in his (1994) study which investigated the effects of input enhancement of grammatical information on

125 second- and fourth-semester college-level learners' intake of both Spanish present perfect and the relative pronouns (*que* and *quien*), found significant difference for input enhancement of grammatical forms on learners' intake and production of these grammatical structures between the group exposed to enhanced/instructed condition, and the other two groups exposed to enhanced/instructed and non-enhanced conditions. The enhanced/instructed group which was instructed to pay attention to the targeted forms outperformed the other two groups in both tasks.

Furthermore, findings by Jourdenais *et al.* (1995) also contradict Leow's (1993, 1995) and Shook's (1990) studies. Jourdenais *et al.*'s study investigated the impact of typographic manipulation and typographic cues (bolding, shading, and underlining) on noticing the imperfect and preterit forms in the written input. Ten college-level students enrolled in a second-semester class were assigned to two groups: the enhancement group who received a text enhanced by underlining and shading preterit forms, and bolding and underlining imperfect in the written input, and the comparison group who received non-enhanced version of the text, and were given a written task where they had to think aloud while performing it. The comparison of the performance of the two groups reveals that the enhancement group produced more episodes related to selection and conjugation of the two forms (the preterit and imperfect) and more target grammatical structures on the written task than the comparison group.

To sum up, these above-cited studies did investigate the issue of written input modification and manipulation on learners' recall and intake of linguistic forms and on comprehension of text content, and presented conflicting findings.

### 3. The Study

I conducted this study in order to build upon previous research and to provide further support to the findings of a previous study about the impact of input enhancement on L2 French subjunctive forms (Redouane, 2004). The main objective was to determine the effects of written input

modification on adult low intermediate L2 French learners' attention and recall of French *passé composé* and their comprehension of text content. An intact class of 17 American university students enrolled in Intermediate L2 French class participated in this study. Subjects were randomly assigned to two conditions: 9 to non-modified text, and 8 to modified text.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- Will learners exposed to modified input recall more *passé composé* forms contained in the written text than learners exposed to non-modified text?
- Will learners exposed to modified input achieve higher comprehension of the text content than those exposed to non-modified text?

### 3.1. Methodology

The original French text was taken from the textbook *Collage Variétés Culturelles*, p.192. To address the effects of input modification, beside the original version of the text (Appendix A), another version of this text was prepared. The modified version (Appendix B) comprised the original text with one difference: 12 instances of verbs in the *passé composé* tense were bolded and underlined.

To measure participant's level of text comprehension, 10 comprehension questions were given to the participants (Appendix C). Because production of the foreign language was not an issue in this study, participants were required to answer in English. To measure participants' recall of these targeted past verbs in the input, a multiple-choice recall task was given to the participants (Appendix D). There were 10 items on this task taken from the text. Participants were asked to fill the blank in each sentence by the verb they judged appropriate and use the correct past participle. This task comprised both the pre-test and post-test with only one difference that the targeted verbs are presented in different contexts. Students were asked to choose the correct verb from four choices. The choices consist of other meanings, and in some cases of distracters.

One week before the experiment, participants completed a pre-test designed to measure their grammatical recognition of the *passé composé* in French of different verbs. On the day of the experiment, participants in each group were given one of the two texts and were required to read it at their own pace. When the participants finished reading the texts, they had to answer the comprehension questions and complete the multiple-choice recall task without the reading text in hand.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

To measure learners' recall of linguistic forms provided in the input and comprehension of text content, the mean scores of the two groups obtained on the comprehension and multiple-choice recall tasks were calculated. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the raw scores obtained on the comprehension task and the multiple-choice recall task respectively to measure the effects of textual modification on learners' comprehension of text content and recall of grammatical forms.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 and Table 2 display the mean scores and standard deviations for each group on the comprehension and on the pre-test and post-test multiple-choice recall tasks. Findings of the comprehension task reveal that the means of the modified text are higher than those of the non-modified text. Participants who have been exposed to modified text showed higher comprehension of the text content than the participants who have been exposed to non-modified text. Also, in the recall task, the modified group did better in the post-test than the group that was exposed to non-modified text.

**Table 1 : Means Scores and Standard Deviations for Each Group on the Comprehension Task**

Group	M	SD
Modified	<b>2.50</b>	1.054
Non-modified	<b>.889</b>	1.309

Maximum scores=10

**Table 2: Means scores and Standard Deviations for Each group on the Pre-test and Post-test Multiple-choice Recall Task**

Group		Pre-test	Post-test
Modified	M	<b>6.62</b>	<b>9.12</b>
	SD	1.30	0.99

n=8

Non-modified

M	5.77	6.66
SD	1.64	1.36

n=9

Maximum scores=10

The results of the ANOVA on comprehension task (Table 3) revealed that the main effect for the text modification on recall and retention of the targeted forms was significant ( $F [1, 17] = 5.24, p = .037$ .) Participants exposed to the modified text did demonstrate better recall and retention of the targeted forms when compared to those exposed to the non-modified text. Also, a significant main effect for input modification on comprehension of text content was revealed as statistically significant. Students exposed to the modified version comprehended significantly more of the content of the text when compared to students exposed to the non-modified text.



**Table 3 : ANOVA Results on the Recall Task**

<b>Source of variation</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Group	1	9.353	9.353	5.24	.037*
Error	15	26.764	1.785		

n= 17

\*p&lt;.05

The two-way ANOVA performed on the scores on the pre-test and the post-test recognition task revealed that the main effect for the text modification was significant ( $F [1, 17] = 1.36, p = .026$ ) (see Table 4). Subjects in the modified group showed an overall improvement in performance on their post-test when compared to their performance on the pre-test (6.62 vs. 9.12).

**Table 4: ANOVA Results on Pre-test and Post-test the Recall Task**

<b>Source of variation</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Pre-test	1	3.040	3.040	1.36	.026*
Post-test	1	25.595	25.595	9.39	.007*
Error		15	33.47		2.22

n= 17

\*p&lt;.05

Based on these results, the answer to the first research question that asked whether learners exposed to input enhancement recognize more *passé composé* verbs contained in the written text than learners exposed to non-modified text appears to be affirmative. Learners exposed to the modified input seem to recognize more verbs when compared to learners that were not exposed to these modified forms in the input. Findings of this study corroborates findings reported in Shook's (1994), Jourdenais et al.'s (1995), and Redouane (2004) that input enhancement promotes attention to and recall of targeted L2 forms in the input. But, this significant effect of input modification on readers' intake contradicts findings reported in Leow's, (1993, 1995, 1997b) in which textual manipulation of the input was not found to facilitate learners' intake of the target linguistic forms.

The answer to the second question addressing if learners exposed to input modification would achieve higher comprehension of the content information than those exposed to non-modified input is also affirmative. Input modification does appear to have a significant impact on learners' comprehension of the text content when compared to learners who did not receive this kind of input modification. In other words, highlighting the verbs in the *passé composé* in the input through the use of typographic cues, that is bolding and underlining, did appear to be effective in focusing readers' attention to these targeted forms to comprehend the passage. This finding corroborates findings in previous study by Redouane (2004) that looked at the efficacy of input enhancement on the acquisition of L2 French subjunctive forms and in which it was found that learners who were exposed to either to enhanced or enhanced and short texts recalled more subjunctive forms than those who were exposed to non-enhanced long or short texts. However, this finding runs counter to Shook's (1990) and Leow's (1993, 1995, 1997b) studies that found no main effect of input modification on L2 learners' comprehension of text content. This discrepancy in findings with regard to the effects of input modification and manipulation in attending to more target linguistic and grammatical forms may be attributed according to Leow (1997b) to:

some variables that need to be considered and controlled, such as the amount or level of reader's attention they pay to the enhanced forms; the role of awareness while interacting with the input; the amount of exposure, and learners' level of L2 proficiency. (180)

### **5. Pedagogical Implication of the study**

This study makes informal pedagogical decisions on the selection of specific types of reading materials. These latter consist of enhanced modified written texts that may have effects on adult reading comprehension and understanding of linguistic items. This study has provided empirical evidence that supports the validity and efficacy of exposing L2 learners to enhanced reading texts to facilitate their reading comprehension and recall of *passé composé* verbs contained in the input. In selecting reading texts, teachers should take into consideration the limited cognitive capacity of learners in the L2. They should also choose contextualizing reading texts that present the grammatical point or vocabulary in a specific context. Additionally, students should manipulate reading texts to ease readers' comprehension of the text, and to allow them to attend to more grammatical forms before they formally introduced in the class. In addition, teachers should teach students process-reading approaches that help them develop strategies for reading comprehension. Moreover, they should introduce the reading through a suitable advance organizer.

### **6. Implication for Future Research**

While findings of this present study seem to suggest that written input enhancement has some positive impact on L2 learners' noticing the target grammatical forms and their comprehension, they cannot be generalized and need to be taken with some caution due to some limitations and shortcomings. Some of these limitations are the small sample of participants. This study involves only one class of 17 L2 French intermediate students divided in 2 groups. Additional research

involving more than one class of L2 French intermediate students is needed in order to attain a considerable sample of subjects, using learners various levels of proficiency in L2. Research is also needed to gather data from a variety of languages with similar or different grammatical structures and rules to find out whether textual manipulation would work for most languages. Moreover, research is needed to explore more grammatical structures in French. The target linguistic item investigated here is restricted only to the *passé composé*. Various grammatical structures such as the *imparfait* and the conditional should be investigated to obtain a better view of optimal textual modification for recall French grammatical structures and to add to the validity of the conclusion. Further research is also needed to investigate this aspect via other data collection instruments and methods in order to assess the effects of different data collection methods on learners' performance.

## 7. Conclusion

This is the second empirical study by the researcher reporting the effectiveness of input enhancement on L2 French learners' noticing French grammatical forms and on their comprehension of text content. This study contributes to the field of research of textual manipulation by adding more empirical evidence. It also addresses the practical aspects of written input enhancement in promoting comprehension, processing and retaining targeted forms. More importantly, it provides teachers with useful insights into the teaching of L2 French grammatical structures through reading enhanced materials.

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## APPENDIX A

### TEXT: NON-MODIFIED VERSION

#### L'Acadie

De nos jours, le nom acadie désigne les provinces canadiennes maritimes: la Terre-Neuve, la Nouvelle-Ecosse, le Nouveau-Brunswick et l'Île du Prince-Edward. Qui sont les Acadiens? Ce sont des Français qui sont venus de France au début du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle. Au cours de ce siècle, l'Acadie appartenait tantôt aux Français, tantôt aux Anglais. Elle a changé de mains neuf fois en cent ans. Finalement en 1713, l'Acadie est passée définitivement sous la domination anglaise.

Peu après, les Anglais ont réclamé un pacte d'alliance avec les Acadiens qui l'ont refusé car il ne contenait pas de clause stipulant qu'ils ne seraient jamais obligés de prendre les armes contre les Français. Par conséquent, en 1755, 6 500 Acadiens ont été déportés aux États-Unis, et en 1758-1759, 3 000 en Angleterre. La plupart des Acadiens qui ont été envoyés aux États-Unis se sont installés en Louisiane, une colonie française à l'époque. Beaucoup d'Acadiens qui sont dispersés en Europe ont regagné la Bretagne, en France.

Actuellement, le français n'est pas la langue officielle en Acadie comme c'est le cas au Québec. Souvent, il n'y a ni école ni église française. Dans certaines régions, la population acadienne s'anglicise pour pouvoir survivre économiquement. Sans un effort intense et tenace, la cause française sera perdue en Acadie.

## APPENDIX B

## MODIFIED TEXT

## INSTRUCTION:

Read the following article. While reading the article, focus on comprehending the passage and on noticing the verbs that are **BOLD** and **UNDERLINED**

## L'Acadie

De nos jours, le nom Acadie désigne les provinces canadiennes maritimes: la Terre-Neuve, la Nouvelle-Ecosse, le Nouveau-Brunswick et l'Île du Prince-Edward. Qui sont les Acadiens? Ce sont des Français qui **sont venus** de France au début du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle. Au cours de ce siècle, l'Acadie appartenait tantôt aux Français, tantôt aux Anglais. Elle **a changé** de mains neuf fois en cent ans. Finalement en 1713, l'Acadie **est passée** définitivement sous la domination anglaise.

Peu après, les Anglais **ont réclamé** un pacte d'alliance avec les Acadiens qui l'**ont refusé** car il ne contenait pas de clause stipulant qu'ils ne seraient jamais obligés de prendre les armes contre les Français. Par conséquent, en 1755, 6 500 Acadiens **ont été déportés** aux Etats-Unis, et en 1758-1759, 3 000 en Angleterre. La plupart des Acadiens qui **ont été envoyés** aux Etats-Unis **se sont installés** en Louisiane, une colonie française à l'époque. Beaucoup d'Acadiens qui **sont dispersés** en Europe **ont regagné** la Bretagne, en France.

Actuellement, le français n'est pas la langue officielle en Acadie comme c'est le cas au Québec. Souvent, il n'y a ni école ni église française. Dans certaines régions, la population acadienne s'anglicise pour pouvoir survivre économiquement. Sans un effort intense et tenace, la cause française sera perdue en Acadie.



**APPENDIX C**  
**COMPREHENSION TASK**

**ANSWER THE TEN QUESTIONS**  
**AFTER READING THE TEXT.**

1. D'où les Acadiens sont-ils venus?

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2. Combien de fois l'Acadie a-t-elle changé de mains?

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3. Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé en 1713?

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4. Qu'est-ce que les Anglais ont réclamé avec les Acadiens?

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5. Pourquoi les Acadiens ont-ils refusé l'alliance avec les Anglais?

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6. Quand les Anglais ont-ils déporté les Acadiens aux Etats-Unis?

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7. Combien d'Acadiens ont été envoyés aux Etats-Unis?

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8. Où est-ce que la plupart des Acadiens se sont installés aux Etats-Unis?

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9. Dans quelle partie du monde les Acadiens ont-ils été dispersés?

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10. Quelle région en France les Acadiens ont-ils regagné?

**APPENDIX D**  
**MULTIPLE CHOICE RECALL TASK**

Fill the blanks with the right verb from the list provided to convey the same meaning in the text. Conjugate the verb in the **PASSÉ COMPOSÉ**.

1. Les Acadiens sont des Français qui \_\_\_\_\_ de France au début du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle.

- a. revenir
- b. vivre
- c. venir
- d. envoyer

2. L'Acadie \_\_\_\_\_ de mains neuf fois en cent ans.

- a. charger
- b. chercher
- c. demander
- d. changer

3. L'Acadie \_\_\_\_\_ définitivement sous la domination anglaise.

- a. rester
- b. dépasser
- c. surprendre
- d. passer

4. Les Anglais \_\_\_\_\_ un pacte d'alliance avec les Acadiens.
- a. proclamer
  - b. déclarer
  - e. réclamer
  - d. recommander
5. Les Acadiens \_\_\_\_\_ cette alliance avec les Anglais.
- a. refuser
  - b. diffuser
  - c. définir
  - d. refuter
6. On \_\_\_\_\_ 6 500 Acadiens aux Etats-Unis.
- a. porter
  - b. déporter
  - c. emporter
  - d. apporter
7. On \_\_\_\_\_ la plupart des Acadiens aux Etats-Unis .
- a. voir
  - b. envoyer
  - c. revoir
  - d. renvoyer
8. La plupart des Acadiens \_\_\_\_\_ en Louisiane.
- a. instiller
  - b. installer
  - c. s'installer
  - d. instaurer

9. Beaucoup d'Acadiens \_\_\_\_\_ en Europe.

- a. penser
- b. dispenser
- c. persécuter
- d. disperser

10. Beaucoup d'Acadiens \_\_\_\_\_ la Bretagne.

- a. regagner
- b. gouverner
- c. gagner
- d. garantir