

**Dissertation Title:**

Saliency, frequency, and aptitude in the learning of unaccusativity in a second language: An input enhancement study

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**Summary:**

Working from the perspective of usage-based accounts of language learning (e.g., Ellis, 2008; Robinson & Ellis, 2008), this dissertation research examined the instructional benefits of input enhancement on the processing of the unaccusative construction in English by Korean high school students. The processing of form for learning by second language (L2) learners was expected to be affected by the roles of: types of input saliency (enhancement versus flood), types of input frequency distribution (skewed versus balanced), and two aptitudinal factors (language-analytic ability and working memory capacity).

One hundred fifty-four participants, randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups and two control groups, were presented with five versions of an L2 reading passage. Each experimental text contained six unaccusative verbs selected based on their corpus frequencies. Instances of the six verbs were visually highlighted in the enhancement condition, whereas they were presented in a plain text format in the flood condition. In the skewed distribution condition, happen was predominantly presented as a prototypical member. By contrast, each verb appeared twice in the balanced distribution condition. Overall token frequency of the verbs was equal in all four experimental conditions. In the fifth, control condition, the text contained no unaccusatives but delivered the same content as the experimental texts.

Three equivalent, counterbalanced sections of a scaled grammaticality judgment task were administered to measure the extent of change in the students' knowledge of unaccusatives immediately as well as three weeks after the treatments. Results indicated that the participants immediately benefited from the reading materials containing the salient and frequent input instances. However, statistically significant mean differences among the three levels of the saliency factor existed only between the enhancement and the control. Likewise, statistically significant mean differences among the three levels of the distribution factor existed only between the balanced distribution and the control. The treatment effects, though not generalizable, were somewhat durable with some deterioration over three weeks. While the two aptitude measures appeared to measure a

distinct component of the construct well, only the analytical performances correlated weakly with the delayed judgment scores.

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