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To cite this article: Gianna Hartung & Arzu Çöltekin (2019): Fixing an illusion – an empirical assessment of correction methods for the terrain reversal effect in satellite images, International Journal of Digital Earth, DOI: [10.1080/17538947.2019.1681526](https://doi.org/10.1080/17538947.2019.1681526)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538947.2019.1681526>



Published online: 20 Oct 2019.



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Fixing an illusion – an empirical assessment of correction methods for the terrain reversal effect in satellite images

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ABSTRACT

Identifying land forms and land cover classes are important tasks in image interpretation. Sometimes, a phenomenon called *terrain reversal effect* (TRE) causes an inverted perception of 3D forms. When this inversion occurs, valleys appear as ridges and vice versa. While the TRE can severely impair the ability to identify 3D land forms, ‘correcting’ for the TRE in imagery can introduce new problems. Importantly, one of most commonly-proposed methods – shaded relief map (SRM) overlay – appears to impair the ability to identify land cover classes. In this paper, we report a comparative empirical evaluation of an SRM overlay solution, and its ‘enhanced’ versions supported by various other cues (stereopsis, motion, labels). In response to the different solutions, we measure the effectiveness, efficiency, confidence and preferences of our participants in land form and land cover identification tasks. All examined methods significantly improve the ability to detect land forms accurately, but they also impair the ability to identify the land cover classes to different degrees. Additionally, participants’ visualization preferences contradict their performance with them, calling for reflection on the visual effects of the applied correction methods. Based on the study, recommendations concerning the correction of the TRE are drawn, and gaps are identified.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 June 2019
Accepted 14 October 2019

KEYWORDS

Terrain reversal effect; satellite images; correction methods; shaded relief map; stereoscopy; motion

1. Introduction and background

Technical developments in the last few decades provided satellite images and shaded relief maps (SRMs) in unprecedented quality to anyone with Internet access (Çöltekin, Lokka, and Boér 2015). These geographic displays are not only of critical importance in many domains that require expertise (e.g. earth sciences, resource management, urban planning or disaster/rescue efforts), but also assist people without expertise in everyday tasks such as wayfinding or planning, e.g. hike or bike trips (Boér, Çöltekin, and Clarke 2013). However, both satellite images and SRMs can suffer from a severe visual illusion called the *terrain reversal effect* (Saraf et al. 2007; Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin 2014), also known as *relief inversion* (Imhof 1967), or *false topographic perception phenomenon* (Saraf et al. 1996).

1.1. Terrain reversal (relief inversion)

To construct three-dimensional objects from a two-dimensional representation, the human visual system (HVS) makes various assumptions, one of which is assuming a *single light source* that

illuminates the scene *from above* (Cavanagh and Leclerc 1989; Kleffner and Ramachandran 1992; Lovell, Bloj, and Harris 2012; Mamassian and Goutcher 2001; Saraf et al. 2005; Sun and Perona 1998). Perceptual system benefits from such assumptions to maintain a stable and consistent experience (Lovell, Bloj, and Harris 2012). If the visual scene contains ambiguity, the HVS relies on these assumptions to ‘make sense’ of the scene (Morgenstern, Murray, and Harris 2011). This assumption of the HVS is termed *light-from-above prior*, and it creates expectations in regarding the position/orientation of shadows in a scene as well as on shape perception (e.g. Mamassian and Goutcher 2001; Sun and Perona 1998). If the light comes from a direction that conflicts with the expected light direction, various degrees of relief inversion occurs (Biland and Çöltekin 2017; Gerardin, Kourtzi, and Mamassian 2010).

The light-from-above prior affects perception in geographic displays too, causing the terrain reversal effect (TRE) if shadow is the main depth cue (i.e. satellite images, shaded relief maps, and possibly in some contour maps). Perceptual inversions of the topography induced by the TRE can be harmful, especially when people are unaware of its existence (Saraf et al. 2007). Biland and Çöltekin (2017) have shown that most people are indeed unaware of the fact they might be affected by the TRE. Being unaware of the TRE can lead to misidentification of land forms and the spatial relationships between land forms (Bernabé-Poveda, Sánchez-Ortega, and Çöltekin 2011; Biland and Çöltekin 2017; Çöltekin and Biland 2018; Çöltekin, Lokka, and Zahner 2016). Figure 1 illustrates the TRE on a satellite image (left), along with its corrected version (right) with one of the correction approaches evaluated in this study.

1.2. Cue integration theory

The HVS has several mechanisms for perceiving depth, and the depth cues, such as *relative size*, *shadow*, *perspective* or *binocular parallax* feed these mechanisms (Goldstein and Brockmole 2016). In the case of multiple cues, cue integration theory posits that the HVS fuses them to improve depth perception (Lovell, Bloj, and Harris 2012). According to the *linear* cue integration theory; cues have different weights, and each cue is processed separately by the HVS first, then the various depth estimations are combined by assigning weights to each cue according to its reliability compared to other cues in the respective scene (Landy et al. 1995; Lovell, Bloj, and Harris 2012). Alternatively, a *non-linear* integration theory suggests that cues complement each other ‘as needed’, either because all or some of them are weak (e.g. Bühlhoff and Mallot 1988; Hubona et al. 1999; Vuong, Domini, and Caudek 2006). There are various complex interactions between the cues (Vuong, Domini, and Caudek 2006). For example, the depth cues can help with disambiguation of the

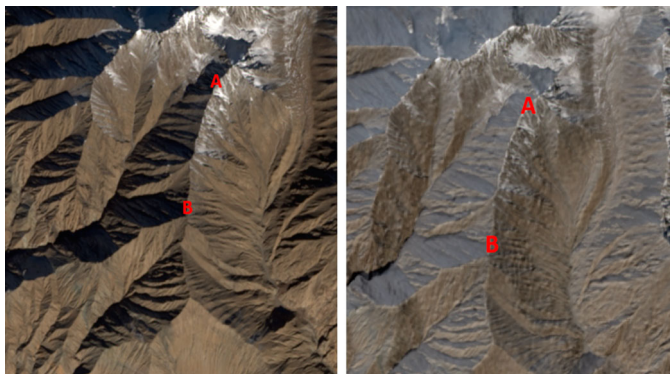


Figure 1. An original satellite image with terrain reversal (right), and the corrected version with an SRM overlay (left) without terrain reversal. The landmark marked A–B is a ridge in both images, but it appears as a valley in the left image, and as a ridge in the right, to the majority of people.

scene, that is, one cue might reduce the ambiguity of another one. The cues can also ‘veto’ one another, or the stronger ones might override weaker ones in a conflicting situation in a way that almost only the stronger cue contributes to the depth perception (Bülthoff and Mallot 1988; Landy et al. 1995).

1.3. Correction methods

In the TRE, the key depth cue is shading/shadows. Relying on an understanding of the depth cues, how they might interact, and how they can be manipulated in visuospatial displays; several correction methods have been proposed for the TRE. A categorization of (some of) the proposed correction methods was published by Zhang, Yue, and Yuan (2016). We adopted Zhang et al.’s approach (2016), and extended it, as shown in Table 1. Note that while the methods in the category ‘direct change’ (Table 1) make use of an SRM for correcting the TRE, the methods indicated as ‘indirect change’ methods do not use such a model. Also note that the advantages and disadvantages listed in Table 1 are mostly based on theoretical positions or qualitative evaluations of the authors who proposed them, and not necessarily supported by empirical evidence. The proposed ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ might depend on the eventual use case of the images, for example, for pure human viewing (image interpretation), the fact that radiometric information is modified would

Table 1. An overview of correction methods for the TRE.

Category	Method (relevant publication)	Advantage	Disadvantage
Change the viewing angle	<i>Rotating the image</i> by 180° (Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin 2014; Saraf et al. 1996; Saraf et al. 2007; Wu, Li, and Gao 2013; Zhang, Yue, and Yuan 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low cost/effort - removes inversion - applicable on analogue images - preserves color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conventional north is lost, impedes orientation - introduces inversion in southern hemisphere images (Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin 2014)
Indirect change	<p>Taking the <i>negative</i> of the image (Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Bernabé-Poveda, Sánchez-Ortega, and Çöltekin 2011; Gil et al. 2014; Saraf et al. 1996; Saraf et al. 2007)</p> <p><i>color/pixel adjustment</i> (Bernabé-Poveda, Sánchez-Ortega, and Çöltekin 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conventional north preserved - removes inversion - useful for grayscale images - can be enhanced with color-balancing (Saraf et al. 2007; Wu, Li, and Gao 2013) - low cost and effort - enhanced contrast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - colors are distorted - does not always remove inversion - surface and texture information are reduced - lowers contrast - degrades color information strongly
Direct change	<p><i>Fusion</i> of an SRM and a satellite image using a low-pass filter (Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Zhang, Yue, and Yuan 2016)</p> <p><i>SRM overlay</i>: taking the SRM as <i>intensity</i> image and the hue and saturation from the original satellite image (Bernabé-Poveda, Sánchez-Ortega, and Çöltekin 2011; Gil et al. 2010; Saraf et al. 2005; Saraf et al. 2007)</p> <p>Similar to SRM overlay: <i>principal component analysis</i> on intensity-hue-saturation channels using composite images (Gil et al. 2014)</p> <p><i>Shift invariant</i></p> <p><i>wavelet transformation</i> (Wu, Li, and Gao 2013; Zhang, Yue, and Yuan 2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tries to preserve color intensity - realistic looking result - robust - already ortho-rectified - conventional north is kept - realistic looking result - robust - already ortho-rectified - conventional north is kept - minimizes color distortion - high precision - stable and consistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high cost and effort - radiometric information is adapted - high cost and effort - issues with fully shadowed or very bright areas - radiometric information is adapted - high cost & effort - issues with high-contrast areas - radiometric information is adapted - high cost and effort - radiometric information is adapted

Notes: We adopted the basic categorization from Zhang, Yue, and Yuan (2016), updated it with more literature, and added explicit columns on the advantage/disadvantage of each method as proposed by the authors. Note that when the colors and other radiometric information are distorted, image classification algorithms might be affected by this. As a reminder; methods marked as ‘direct change’ use SRM, whereas those marked ‘indirect change’ do not.

not matter, but if the images will be subject to image classification methods for spatial analyses, it might be very important to be aware of the consequences.

A frequently proposed correction technique is the SRM overlay; in which the satellite images with TRE are overlain with a semi-transparent SRM (e.g. Saraf et al. 2005; 2007). Traditionally, SRMs are produced with the illumination source at an azimuth angle of 315°, and at 45° altitude, which produces nearly TRE-free SRMs; even though according to a recent empirical study, illumination source at 337.5° is better for removing the TRE (Biland and Çöltekin 2017). The recommended opacity levels of the SRM vary, but all based on qualitative reasoning so far. For example, Gil et al. (2014) considered 30% for panchromatic and 50% for multispectral images, but they have not tested these opacity levels in user studies. The SRM overlay has the advantage that the corrected image is already ortho-rectified, oriented towards the north, and the initial radiometric characteristics are kept (Gil et al. 2014). Therefore, image classification can be applied afterwards without constraints because the images ‘only’ lay on top of each other as layers, and thus do not interfere with the radiometric values. It is also a simple and fast method (Gil et al. 2014). Disadvantages are found in the loss of image sharpness due to the overlay, and the subsequent color desaturation (Gil et al. 2014). This is especially unfavorable for images with low spatial resolution. Among the correction methods we identified; the overlay of a semi-transparent SRM is frequently proposed as an effective, robust and feasible solution (Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Saraf et al. 2005; Wu, Li, and Gao 2013).

1.4. Stereo, motion and labels

While shadow is the critical depth cue in the TRE, and the correction methods often manipulate the cast shadows in the image; based on the cue integration theory, we believe other cues might help amplify or suppress the TRE. For the orthogonally viewed satellite images, aside from shadows, *stereo* and *motion* might be most relevant for improving depth perception. Furthermore, as satellite maps are usually provided with *labels*, and labels might serve as additional semantic cues that may counter the TRE or help interpret the land cover, we include labels as one of the variables in this study.

Stereopsis is a strong depth cue, and its effect in-depth perception was shown to be greater than shadows (Bülthoff and Mallot 1988; Lovell, Bloj, and Harris 2012). While there are many ways to create stereoscopic displays, a common and low-cost method is to create an anaglyph image through color separation (Gargantini, Facoetti, and Vitali 2014). Anaglyphs are easy to create, can be used with hard as well as soft-copy images, and can be viewed by multiple users simultaneously. On the other hand, some color information is lost with anaglyph images, and similarly to other stereo displays, anaglyphs can cause nausea, discomfort as well as ‘ghosting’ when the overlapping of the two images is not optimal (Mehrabi et al. 2013; Řeřábek et al. 2011; Westheimer 2011).

Motion is not explored extensively to display depth in visualizations (Willett et al. 2015). In nature, either the observer moves in relation to the object creating *motion parallax* (e.g. Rogers and Graham 1979), or the object moves – or is moved by the person – creating *object motion*. van Beurden, Kuijsters, and IJsselsteijn (2010) have shown that images with object motion as well as motion parallax lead to higher accuracy in 3D shape detection than images without motion, but object motion ‘outperforms’ motion parallax in terms of cognitive load and discomfort.

Both *stereo* and *motion* are considered dominant depth cues, and comparative studies suggest similar results regarding the accuracy in 3D shape detection (Çöltekin, Lokka, and Boér 2015; Hubona et al. 1999; Liu and Todd 2004; Řeřábek et al. 2011; Todd and Norman 2003; Vezzani, Kramer, and Bressan 2015).

As mentioned earlier, we investigated the use of *labels* as additional semantic cues. Labels are clearly not ‘natural’ nor pictorial, but they are important as they are often used in maps, and they can interfere with depth perception and have strong impact on in scene interpretation (Kruijff,

Swan, and Feiner 2010; Liu, Gould, and Koller 2010; Polys, Kim, and Bowman 2005; Uratani et al. 2005). Labels can potentially be used by the viewers to compensate against the TRE.

2. Objectives

Correcting the TRE in satellite images is of interest to both map providers and users, but the side-effects of the proposed treatments are not well understood. We address this gap through a comprehensive empirical evaluation of various correction methods that are proposed in literature (e.g. Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Saraf et al. 1996; Saraf et al. 2005; Saraf et al. 2007; Wu, Li, and Gao 2013). To this end, we empirically assess a selected set of promising correction methods to understand which one ‘fixes’ the terrain reversal effect in a way that helps with selected image interpretation tasks and fits well for the goals of satellite map users.

Specifically, we examine the participants’ *accuracy*, *response time*, and *confidence* in land form and land cover recognition tasks using an original satellite image compared to several corrected images (an SRM overlay solution with 65% opacity *Relief_65*, and combinations of the *Relief_65* with *labels*, *stereo*, and *motion*). We also collect participant’s *quality ratings* and *preferences* regarding each image type. Based on the cue integration theory, we hypothesize that participants will perform better with the combined methods (*Relief_65* with labels, stereo and motion) than with the SRM overlay alone, or the original image, in land form recognition tasks. We expect that SRM overlay will help against the TRE, but impair the accuracy of land cover identification due to opacity masking some photographic detail, however, the additional cues should not necessarily influence the land cover perception. Consequently, we hypothesize that participants will perform best with the original satellite image in land cover recognition tasks, and worse with the SRM-overlain images, irrespective of the additional cues. Furthermore, based on intuition and preliminary observations, we hypothesize that with increasing opacity, people will identify landforms better; whereas the opposite is true for landcover identification (increasing opacity should impair landcover identification).

3. Methods

Our main method is a controlled lab experiment. To inform this controlled experiment, we first conducted an online experiment to specify an important parameter in the SRM overlay method: The opacity levels of the overlain SRM. Below we summarize the methods for both the online and the main experiment.

3.1. Preliminary experiment: the effects of opacity levels in SRM overlays

Success of the *SRM overlay* method largely depends on the opacity levels of the SRM, which is not systematically examined so far. To better inform our stimuli design, we first examined the effects of the SRM overlay with three different opacity levels (45%, 65% and 85%) on TRE correction, and on land cover identification. These opacity levels (Figure 2) were chosen based on previous research (Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin 2014; Bernabé-Poveda, Manso-Callejo, and Ballari 2005; Gil et al. 2014). From this point forward, we call the visualization types shown in Figure 2 as *Original*, *Relief_45*, *Relief_65*, *Relief_85*.

In this experiment, 93 participants (52 women, 41 men) solved a total of 80 terrain (TRE) and land cover identification (LC) tasks in randomized order in a 2×4 mixed factorial design. Two task types were TRE and LC, and four display (visualization) types were as shown in Figure 2. While TRE and LC conditions are between-subject, the two factors have a within-subject design. Each display type contained ten items counterbalanced for a variety of factors that could potentially affect the outcome (as described in Section 3.4). Consequently, each participant solved 80 tasks with an average task completion time of 29 minutes. In this study, we were mainly interested in response accuracy, which is reported under ‘Preliminary Experiment’ in the Results section.



Figure 2. An illustration of how the changing opacity levels affect the outcome with the SRM overlay solution. Left to right: original satellite image, SRM overlain with 45%, 65%, and 85% opacity levels.

3.2. Main experiment: design

Based on our findings in the online study, we picked the Relief_65 as the functional ‘middle-ground’, and adopted it as the SRM correction for the main experiment. Because this is a compromise solution and is imperfect on both accounts (TRE and LC); we further investigated if (and how much) this method would be supported by adding other cues in the visualization, inspired by the cue integration theories. Thus, the *independent variables* in the main experiment are five visualization (display) types: The *original* satellite image was retained as a baseline, and Relief_65 as the main solution. Then, selected additional cues were added on the Relief_65. Namely, we created three more display types (visualizations): Relief_65 + labels, Relief_65 + stereo, Relief_65 + motion. Examples for these three combined correction methods are shown in Figure 3.

As *dependent variables*, we measured participants’ *response accuracy*, *response time* with each visualization type when they worked with the experimental tasks, and their *confidence* in their responses, as well as their *preferences* and their *quality ratings* for the examined displays. We hypothesized that the ‘best correction method’ among the tested ones should lead to high accuracy in both TRE and LC tasks, a low response time, and an overall positive subjective experience based on confidence, preference and quality metrics.

3.3. Participants

A total of 35 people (17 women, 18 men, average age: 32.14) participated in the study. We had three inclusion criteria: Participants should (1) not be experts in geography and related domains, (2) not have taken part in the preliminary study, and (3) be able to see in stereo.

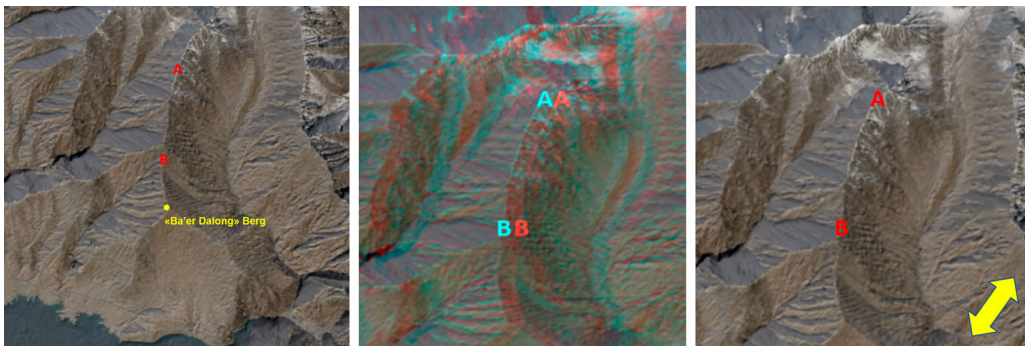


Figure 3. Examples of added cues on the SRM overlay. Left to right: with labels, with anaglyph stereo (needs red/cyan glasses for 3D viewing), with motion (arrow represents the presence of motion, in the experiment this was an animation).

3.4. Materials

We utilized a commercial questionnaire tool for collecting participants' background information and subjective ratings. To test stereo abilities, we used a free service provided by a university (<http://3d.mcgill.ca/cbc/>). The stimuli were obtained using satellite images and DEMs from the EarthExplorer4 of USGS5 (<https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/>). Satellite images with TRE, and without well-known landmarks, were chosen from North America, Canada and China. Using an appropriate scale, we obscured the graphic location of the terrains, and counterbalanced for convex and concave forms, as well as for land cover types and land form orientation (facing north, northeast, south and southwest). We downloaded the DEMs using SRTM data from ASTER GDEM V26 at 1 arc-second (approximately 30 m) resolution. For the hill shading of SRM overlays, the azimuth was set to 315° and the altitude of the light source to 45°, following the cartographic convention (Biland and Çöltekin 2017; Gil et al. 2010). The first of the additional cues we explored was the use of *labels*. For control purposes, we added only one label per image related to the 3D feature. We counterbalanced the amount of help participants might get from the labels by assigning either 'difficult' labels containing proper but unfamiliar names of geographical features or 'easy' ones including nouns for land forms (e.g. 'hill', 'lake' etc.) in equal numbers for each condition. The second additional cue we explored is a well-known contributor to depth perception: *stereopsis*. Stereo images were created using the ghost-reducing function of StereoPhotoMaker (<http://stereo.jp.org/eng/stphmkr/>). Participants used anaglyph glasses (red/cyan) for the experimental block that included stereo images. The third depth cue we examine, also an important contributor to depth perception, is *motion*. We implemented motion as a 'wiggle' image (as a diagonal and low flashing animation) using StereoPhotoMaker using stereoscopic image pairs as input. All five visualization types were kept constant in scale and extent in all conditions.

3.5. Procedure

The study was conducted in a controlled laboratory at the Department of Geography of the University of Zurich. Upon arriving at the lab, participants signed a consent form, filled a questionnaire containing demographic questions, and took the stereoscopic vision test. We then briefed the participants about the setup and tasks, and the main experiment began. We instructed participants to answer the questions as quickly as possible, and according to what they see (i.e. not to what they interpret). As the experiment began, participants solved a total of 100 land form (TRE) and land cover (LC) identification tasks (Table 2) based on 10 images in each visualization type (i.e. 50 images × 2 task types).

To measure confidence, for the TRE-questions, the Likert answers *clearly a valley* and *clearly a ridge* implies that participants are *very confident* in their responses, thus we gave them 2 points. For answers *a valley* and *a ridge* we gave them 1 point for confidence; and if they marked *ambiguous*, we gave them 0 points. For the LC-questions, there is a clear right/wrong response. If participants marked *not sure* they got 0 points, while they received 2 points if they responded the question. Based on this, we calculated a mean confidence score ranging between 0 and 2 for both task types. Once they finished the main tasks, participants provided their subjective ratings of quality of each visualization type, and their preferences among them. Participants' rated the quality of each visualization in an explicit 5-point Likert scale and to rate preference, they ordered visualizations (5 'best', 1 'worst').

Table 2. Example tasks for TRE and LC.

Task type	Example question
TRE	The line between A and B appears as ... (1) clearly a valley (2) a valley (3) ambiguous (4) a ridge (5) clearly a ridge
LC	What do you see in the marked area on the image? (a) forest (b) grass (c) rock/sand (d) snow/ice (e) water (f) not sure (g) none of the above

The questions and experiment blocks were randomized to counterbalance for possible order effects. The entire experiment lasted around 60 minutes.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary experiment

As expected, analyzing the number of correct answers reveal a clear conflict: Higher levels of opacity increases performance with TRE tasks, yet, impairs it in LC tasks (Figure 4).

As Figure 4 and Table 3 show, all observed differences are statistically significant with medium to high effect sizes, except in one case. That is, all corrections lead to better landform identification scores and Relif_45 and Relif_65 impair the landcover identification, but Relif_85 does not. The trade-off between TRE tasks and LC tasks is therefore clearly evidenced.

4.2. Main experiment

4.2.1. Performance

Figure 5 and Table 3 show the percentage of correct answers in all tested conditions for both task types.

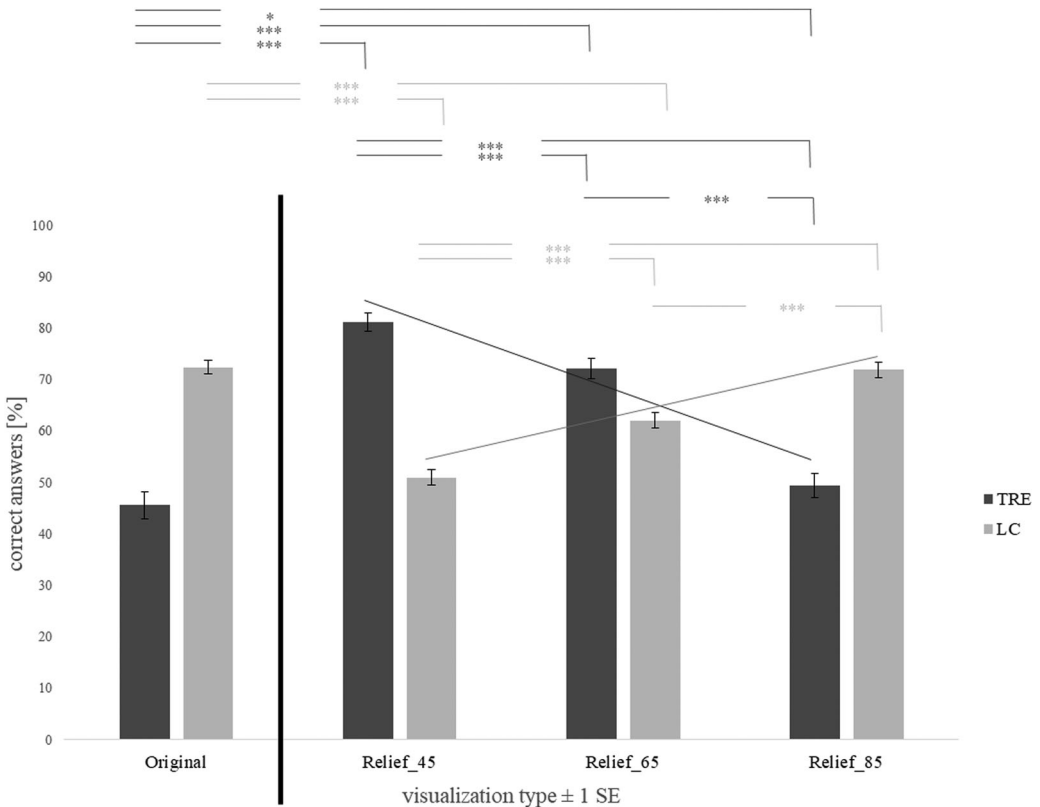


Figure 4. Results of the online study. More opaque overlays 'fix' the TRE better (darker gray bars show a declining trend for accuracy as the transparency increases), whereas more transparent overlays are better for landcover identification (lighter gray bars show an increasing trend for accuracy). Note the answers with the original satellite image do not even reach 50% accuracy for TRE questions. Error bars: SEM. *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$ ($n = 93$). Also see Table 3.

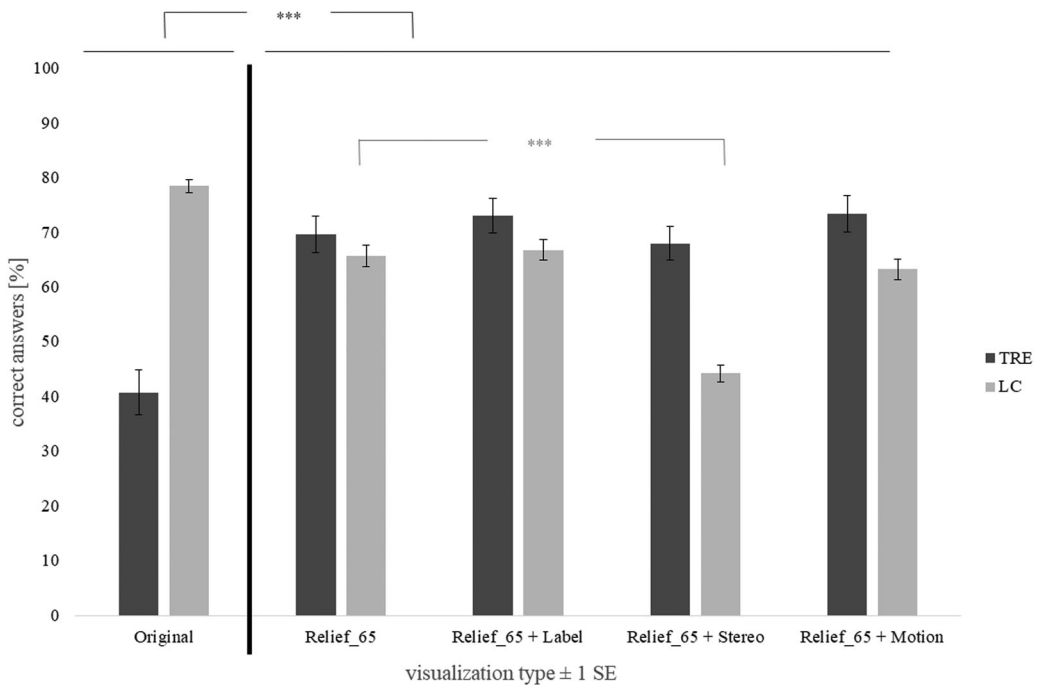


Figure 5. Correct answers for each visualization type in the main experiment, separated by task type. Differences between the original and all of the correction methods are statistically significant, and stereo impairs the LC ability compared to the Relief_65 SRM overlay. *** $p < .001$. Error bars: ± 1 SEM.

Table 3. Numerical summary of the statistical analyses of the effect of each degree of opacity vs. the original satellite image in the two tasks of interest. SD standard deviation. p -values and effect sizes are based on Friedman and Wilcoxon tests.

Question type	Visualization	Mean (%) \pm SD	p -value	Effect size (r)
TRE	Original	45.59 \pm 2.65	–	
	Relief_45	81.05 \pm 1.93	.000***	.69
	Relief_65	72.15 \pm 1.92	.000***	.60
	Relief_85	49.35 \pm 2.32	.01*	.27
LC	Original	72.39 \pm 1.32	–	
	Relief_45	50.92 \pm 1.48	.000***	.84
	Relief_65	61.96 \pm 1.67	.000***	.67
	Relief_85	71.96 \pm 1.36	.48	.07

*** $p < .001$.

As Figure 5 shows, all correction methods provide improvements in TRE tasks and they impair performance in LC tasks, and all observed differences are statistically significant. Thus, the clear conflict we observed earlier (what fixes TRE creates problems for LC) is persistent also after we added new cues in the visualizations. Surprisingly, many participants do not notice this conflict though. Only about half of the participants (49%) reported noticing that there was a conflict between the perceived landforms and land cover.

Since we were set to examine how much the *added cues* help on top of the SRM overlay solution, we examined the observed differences between the SRM overlay and all others. While descriptive statistics suggest some trends (see Table 4), none of the *additional cues* improved accuracy statistically significantly compared to the SRM overlay with 65% opacity (Relief_65). In fact, in stereo (cyan/red anaglyph), condition people did particularly badly in LC tasks.

Response times were not affected by task type or by visualization type, and there was no speed-accuracy trade-off; thus we will not elaborate it further.

Table 4. Mean accuracy in examined conditions. SD: Standard deviation. p -values and effect sizes are based on Friedman and Wilcoxon tests.

Task type	Visualization type	Mean accuracy (%) \pm SD	p -value; effect size (r)
TRE	<i>Original</i>	40.86 \pm 4.13	–
	<i>Relief_65</i>	69.71 \pm 3.29	.000***, .68
	+ <i>Label</i>	73.14 \pm 3.20	.000***, .72
	+ <i>Stereo</i>	68.00 \pm 3.06	.000***, .68
	+ <i>Motion</i>	73.43 \pm 3.38	.000***, .72
LC	<i>Original</i>	78.54 \pm 1.22	–
	<i>Relief_65</i>	65.71 \pm 1.96	.000***, .73
	+ <i>Label</i>	66.83 \pm 1.84	.000***, .69
	+ <i>Stereo</i>	44.31 \pm 1.48	.000***, .87
	+ <i>Motion</i>	63.29 \pm 1.94	.000***, .77

*** $p < .001$.

4.3. Confidence

After establishing that there was a main effect, we conducted pairwise Wilcoxon tests on the confidence scores. For the TRE-questions, differences in participants' confidence with the *Relief_65* ($Mdn = 1.80$, $z = -2.07$, $p = .038$, $r = .35$), and *Relief_65 + Stereo* ($Mdn = 1.70$, $z = -2.15$, $p = .031$, $r = .36$) are lower than the *Original* ($Mdn = 1.80$). For the LC-questions, *Relief_65* ($Mdn = 2.0$, $z = -2.24$, $p = .025$, $r = .38$) and the *Relief_65 + Motion* ($Mdn = 2.00$, $z = -2.88$, $p = .004$, $r = .49$) yielded lower confidence ratings than with the *Original* ($Mdn = 2.00$).

4.4. Quality rating

For the TRE-questions, participants rated the quality of the *Original* ($Mdn = 5.00$) higher than (only) *Relief_65 + Motion* ($Mdn = 4.00$, $z = -2.71$, $p = .007$, $r = .46$), and the *Relief_65* ($Mdn = 4.00$, $z = -2.29$, $p = .022$, $r = .39$). For the LC-questions, quality ratings for all of the 'corrected' visualizations were lower than the *Original* ($Mdn = 4.00$): *Relief_65* ($Mdn = 3.00$, $z = -4.35$, $p = .000$, $r = .73$), *Relief_65 + Label* ($Mdn = 4.00$, $z = -4.25$, $p = .000$, $r = .72$), *Relief_65 Stereo* ($Mdn = 3.00$, $z = -4.36$, $p = .000$, $r = .74$), as well as *Relief_65 + Motion* ($Mdn = 3.00$, $z = -4.09$, $p = .000$, $r = .69$).

4.5. Overall preference

As [Figure 6](#) shows, participants overall prefer the *Original* to the others, closely followed by *Relief_65 + label*.

Wilcoxon tests for pairwise comparisons show that participants prefer the *Original* ($Mdn = 5.00$) to the *Relief_65* ($Mdn = 3.00$, $z = -4.73$, $p = .000$, $r = .80$), to *Relief_65 + Stereo* ($Mdn = 2.00$, $z = -4.05$, $p = .000$, $r = .09$) as well as to *Relief_65 + Motion* ($Mdn = 1.00$, $z = -5.04$, $p = .000$, $r = .68$). Preference ratings for the *Original* and *Label* do not differ.

5. Discussion

5.1. Landform and land cover identification performance

For the two different task types we studied, we hypothesized that (1) Participants would perform best with the original satellite images for the land cover identification (LC) tasks, and overlaying an SRM (irrespective of opacity levels, or added cues) would negatively affect success for this task type; and (2) We would see the opposite for the landform identification tasks, because participants would benefit from the correcting the TRE. We take accuracy in either of the two tasks as the main performance measure, because participant's response times did not differ between any of the tested conditions. Below we first discuss our findings for landform identification (TRE) tasks, followed by a discussion of the land cover identification (LC) tasks.

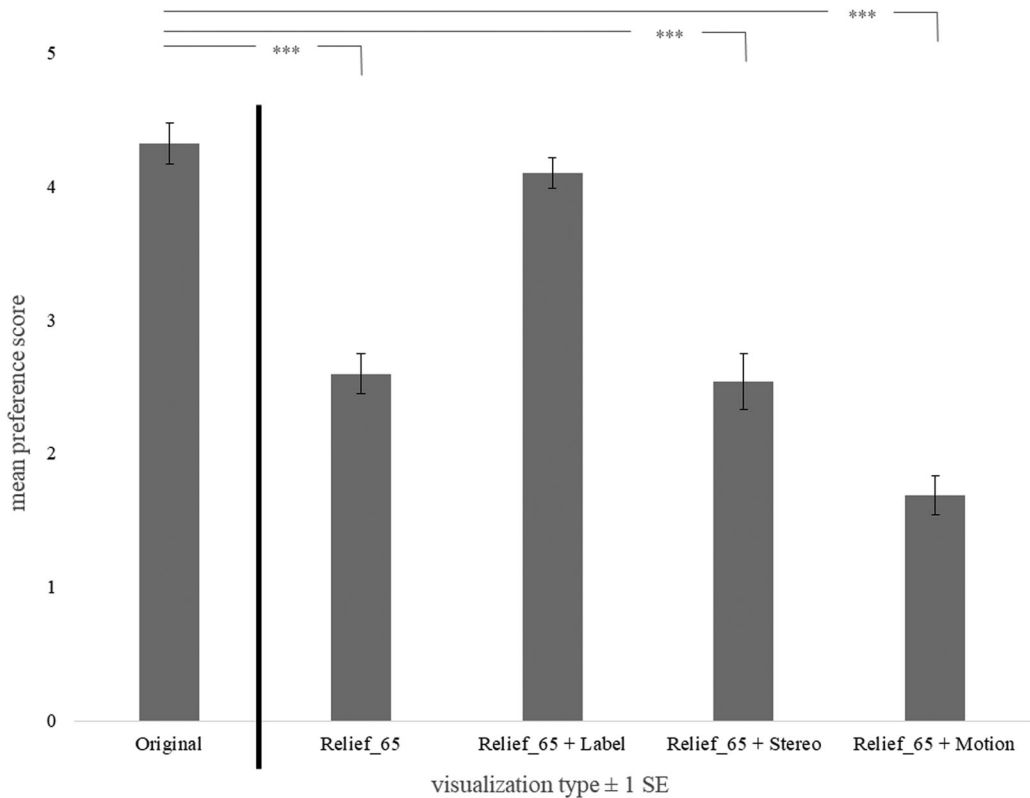


Figure 6. Mean preference score [$0 \leq \text{score} \leq 5$] for each visualization type, separated by task type. *** $p < .001$. Error bars \pm SEM.

5.1.1. Landform identification (i.e. TRE tasks)

As expected, we see improvements in landform identification (i.e. TRE tasks) with the corrected images in varying degrees ($68\% < M < 73\%$, see Figure 5) compared to the original satellite images ($M = 40.9\%$). Note that the 40.9% accuracy in landform identification with the original satellite images in our experiment is comparable to the 40.3% observed by Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin (2014). It is important to highlight the fact that $\sim 60\%$ of the participants *cannot* correctly identify valleys and ridges in the original satellite images in the selected set; but it is also interesting that $\sim 40\%$ of them can. We believe this $\sim 40\%$ success despite the presence of TRE, might be explained by scene interpretation rather than 3D perception. About half of the participants reported noticing contradictions in the scene (such as snow in valley floors), and accordingly, might have concluded that the landform should be a valley or ridge. An earlier study by Çöltekin and Biland (2018) reported results that support this proposition. This interpretation process may be unconscious and might affect the actual depth perception based on participants' informal expressions (anecdotal).

Adding an SRM overlay with 65% opacity on top of the original image adjusts the shadows, and increases the accuracy (from 40.3% with the original images) to a much higher level (69.7%). However, adding more depth cues neither result in a higher accuracy nor in a faster completion time. This observation supports the theory that depth cues are not integrated *linearly* when they co-occur in an image (Bülthoff and Mallot 1988; Landy et al. 1995; Vuong, Domini, and Caudek 2006). Here, it is more probable that single depth cues 'veto' each other depending on their relative reliability in each satellite image scenery. It is also possible that the added depth cues could make the 3D shapes more pronounced and make the TRE stronger, and once the valley or ridge is clearer, a viewer might

wonder, for example, how is it possible to have a river flowing on a ridge. To tease these two effects apart, a dedicated experiment can be conducted as a future study.

5.1.2. Land cover identification (LC) tasks

For land cover (LC) identification questions, as expected, overall, we see the opposite of the TRE tasks: Original image yields the best results (78.5%) and the others all impair successful land cover identification in varying degrees (ranging from 44.3% to 66.8%). *SRM overlay* (with 65% opacity) alone leads to a considerable decrease in landform identification accuracy from the original 78.5% to 65.7%, whereas adding *labels* on top of the SRM overlay bumps the accuracy up a tiny bit (66.8%), but *motion* impairs LC identification performance slightly (63.3%). Overall, adding labels or motion on top of the SRM overlay essentially does not change the outcome. *Stereo*, on the other hand, yielded particularly – and at first, surprisingly – poor LC identification performance (44.4%). An obvious explanation for this is that we used anaglyph method to create stereo images: An additional color-reduction was introduced *on top of* an already color-masking SRM overlay. This combined color reduction might have faded the subtle color differences that allow identifying land cover types (e.g. forestland, grassland, rock/sand, snow/ice). This effect should be further tested to better understand how stereoscopic depth perception interacts with the TRE, ideally in comparison with other stereoscopic viewing methods.

5.1.3. Improving the solutions

Overall, as hypothesized, solutions that improve performance with TRE tasks, impair performance in LC tasks. This is important to remember for those who are attempting to remove the terrain reversal effect. Perhaps a key thought is that instead of trying to find a solution to fit both needs, one should provide one solution per need and warn the users; and importantly, enable them to interactively change the display. One might provide the user an ‘SRM overlay’ layer to switch on and off, thus enabling the imagery for either type of image interpretation tasks. This would work only if we know that the scene is prone to TRE, otherwise one might introduce TRE to a clean image (Bernabé-Poveda and Çöltekin 2014). A machine learning approach to identify whether the image might be prone to TRE first, then offer a solution is also an interesting future direction. Also important to note that the full potential of the discussed methods also depend on how they are implemented.

5.2. Confidence

Confidence when identifying a landform under a visual illusion – such as it is the case with the terrain reversal effect – can be complex to interpret. If people see a valley that is, in fact, a ridge, and mark ‘clearly a valley’ (thus highly confident) we assume that the illusion is strong. Our findings in this study, similar to previous work, confirm that the illusion was strong, as participants were consistently very confident when answering all TRE questions. Similar to Biland and Çöltekin (2017), this finding stands in contrast to participants’ self-evaluation: 49% of the participants stated after the study that they realized the terrain reversal effect. It might be that participants were unaware of the TRE during the completion of the study, but only realized afterwards with what they were informed, or they were answering based on *perceived* 3D shape (as they were instructed), even if they noted logical inconsistencies in land cover information.

Participants were overall more confident with the LC-questions than with the TRE-questions. This is expected, because with the land cover identification tasks, a depth illusion should not be really relevant. On the other hand, masking the scene by adding a semi-transparent layer does occlude some important color and texture information that is critical for identifying the land cover. Thus, the fact that participants mostly felt confident with the LC tasks is perhaps a bit naïve, as their performance could have been better.

5.3. Quality ratings and preference

As expected, participants rated the quality of original image higher than the corrected versions. Because all corrected versions had the SRM overlay which acts as a mask, it is understandable that participants considered these images as 'lower quality'. This is especially reflected in LC-tasks, where participants were told to identify land cover features that were essentially 'behind a curtain'. Participants' visualization preferences correspond only partially with their quality ratings. Participants preferred the original most, followed by the *label*; *SRM overlay* and *stereo* had nearly identical rating, whereas *motion* received the poorest preference ratings. High preference for the unaltered original, similar to the quality rating, is in some way self-exploratory. Image simply looks 'cleaner'. Adding labels on top of the SRM overlay brings the preference rating surprisingly close to the original, suggesting that participants might find some comfort in cognitive cues such as text in a scene interpretation task. The fact that participants did not like the motion (animated wiggle image) is also an interesting finding. In various previous studies, it has been shown that people like animated and interactive displays (Hegarty et al. 2009). In this case, perhaps the constant wiggling annoyed the participants; even though it provides a sense of depth, it might be unnecessarily overstimulating the peripheral vision (Demšar and Çöltekin 2017).

5.4. Conclusions, recommendations and research gaps

Successful interpretation of satellite images involves the correct recognition of land forms and land cover. Only if both parts are equally interpretable, the visualization is useful for a large range of people. Although the ability to perceive land form and land cover can be investigated separately for each visualization type, these two tasks cannot be split up in actual applications of satellite images. While generating images, there is a constant search for the best compromise between good perception of form and communicating other information as for example about the land cover (Willett et al. 2015). It is therefore a requirement that an application-oriented method to correct the terrain reversal effect integrates both abilities. Our study not only provides further evidence on the prevalence of the perceptual issues with satellite images, but provides a through comparative investigation of possible solutions against the TRE. Identifying the best correction method depends on the purpose of the visualization, and the tasks that the individuals want to (or must) accomplish. First thing to ensure is that image providers as well as the users are aware that perceptual issues exist, and that manipulating the familiar appearance a satellite image might influence both performance and preference of the users.

We hypothesized that participants perform better in land form recognition tasks with combined methods than with simple ones. We did not observe an effect confirming this idea. Adding further cues (labels, and the two depth cues stereo and motion) on top of the SRM overlay did not improve performance, although we maintain that more testing is needed to better understand how cue integration theory would be exploited best in this context. Another key finding in this study is that the subjective experience (preference and quality rating) of the participants opposed their performance (accuracy and response time). It has been previously shown that participants' preferred display types do not necessarily correspond to the displays with which individuals perform best (Brügger, Fabrikant, and Çöltekin 2017; Hegarty et al. 2009). From the perspective of a visualization expert, this is important to be aware, and balance between functional, yet desirable solutions.

All in all, given varying individual factors, scene content, goals (e.g. land form vs. land cover identification), and depth cue combinations; it is nearly impossible to select one single correction method with the aim to correct the terrain reversal effect in all possible situations. If the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods investigated in this project are cumulated and analyzed in absolute terms, none of the methods are perfect to correct the terrain reversal effect in satellite images. Nevertheless, the SRM overlay method as a possible approach to correct the terrain reversal effect is still a useful for better *land form perception*. One key issue with the main solution (SRM

overlay) we used is the harmful reduction of color information because of the SRM overlay mask. Future work is needed to maintain the spectral information of the satellite image, thus preserve information that is relevant to classification and interpretation tasks.

Furthermore, understanding the interaction between performance and subjective experience of individuals is important for evaluating correction methods. This might be even more interesting to investigate when interactivity is added to the display (Řeřábek et al. 2011; Willett et al. 2015). Finally, two application-oriented issues could be subject to further studies: on the one hand, the feasibility of a developed method should be considered. Not only is it important that a method works, but also that it provides a good cost–benefit ratio.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Dr Robert Hess and Dr Jeremy Cooperstock for providing the online stereo test and Dr Philip Jörg and Marcel Deggeller for the helpful comments during the stimuli design. We are grateful to all our participants for their patient collaboration as well as the reviewers for their valuable time and intellectual effort. We also would like to thank Miguel A. Bernabe-Poveda for inspiring this research series in our team.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung [grant number 200021_149670/2].

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