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Title

**The Effect of Lexical and Grammatical Collocation
Instruction through Input Flooding versus Awareness
Raising on Short-term and Delayed Retention as well as
Active Use**

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to explore if teaching English collocations through two different modes of awareness-raising and input flooding has any possible differential effect on immediate retention as well as retention in a delayed assessment. It also compared the possible differential effect of teaching English collocations implicitly and explicitly on actively using the items in writing. Moreover, this research tried to out if presenting English collocations through input flooding and awareness-raising has differential effects for lexical and grammatical collocation in both short and longer terms. As the final and fourth question, this study investigated the possible differential effect of the two types of collocations in the two modes of instruction on activation of these items in writing. The data were gathered from 60 homogenous participants who went through input flooding and awareness-raising instruction modes on the two types of collocation. Multiple-choice items were produced and used to assess immediate and longer term retention of the items targeted in the treatment. To measure the active use of collocation items, fill-in-the-blank format was utilized. A series of t-tests, ANOVAs, post-hoc tests, and tests to estimate normal distribution were used to analyze the data. The findings shed light on the difference between the two modalities while highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each. Generally, the main findings pointed to the significant superiority of awareness-raising mode of instruction over input flooding. However, part of this advantage seemed to disappear in the delayed test. The findings also serve as the basis for a number of pedagogical implications such as the need to have a more constructive focus on collocations, the need to diversify instructional methods, and so on.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars have reiterated the fact that lexicon study is of great importance to and a central part of language learning. Some scholars have even stressed that, no matter how skilled students are at grammar, communication will cease without the words to convey meaning (e.g., McCarthy, 1990). Milton (2009) comments that vocabulary is not an elective or insignificant component in the language acquisition process inasmuch as “words are the building blocks of language and without them there is no language” (p. 3).

Throughout history, vocabulary learning has been sidelined in teaching of second languages and learning pedagogy, as will be presented in more detail in Chapter II. O’Dell (1997, cited in Milton, 2009) states that, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, vocabulary and lexis are absent from main books on the syllabus and theory of language teaching. This apparent neglect of vocabulary teaching was largely due to the linguists’ great emphasis on syntax and phonology over vocabulary, under the assumption that vocabulary acquisition could take care of itself (Decarrico, 2001). Nonetheless, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, many voices started to defy the view that vocabulary can be absorbed naturally. This resulted in the revival of interest in vocabulary teaching and the recognition of the significant role of vocabulary during language acquisition (Decarrico, 2001).

However, the resurgence of interest in vocabulary would be fruitless without a clear understanding of the concept of knowing what a word means. Based on this argument, Nation (2001) introduced a common aspect of word knowledge, *receptive* knowledge and *productive* knowledge. Another common aspect was presented by Anderson and Freebody (1981) which classifies word knowledge into breadth of knowledge and depth of knowledge. Nevertheless, the complexity of knowing a word cannot be solved by simple binary classification. Thus, Nation (2001) introduced a complete description of the range of word knowledge. He classified word knowledge into *form*, *meaning*, and *use*. Unfortunately, while some of these types received great attention in teaching contexts such as word form and word meaning, other important aspects such as collocation or use are rarely mentioned (Hodne, 2009).

Within the field of vocabulary, researchers have emphasized the importance of word combinations, also known as formulaic language. Conklin and Schmitt (2007) indicate that lexical combinations are very common in language discourse and differentiate the speech of

native and non-native speakers. Erman and Warren (2000), for instance, analyzed native speakers' written and spoken discourses and determined that formulaic expressions represent 58.6% of the spoken English discourse and 52.3% of the written discourse. Foster (2001), who was looking for formulaic language in informal natives' speech, found that 32.3% of speech consists of formulaic expressions. Furthermore, Howarth (1998), when looking at 238,000 words of academic writing, claims that 31–40% was composed of collocations and idioms. Thus, all these studies show that formulaic language forms a large part of any discourse (Conklin & Schmitt, 2007).

As a subcategory of formulaic language, the notion of collocation has received considerable attention in the field of foreign language learning during the last few decades (Gitsaki, 1999, Webb & Kagimoto, 2009). The term “collocation” has its origin in the Latin verb “collocare” which means “to set in order/to arrange” (Martyńska, 2004, p.2). However, Firth (1957) is considered to be the first to explicitly introduce the term collocation (Gitsaki, 1999). In defining collocation, Firth argues that: “You shall know a word by the company it keeps.” He exemplifies this by using the English words *dark night* as an example of collocation. He clarifies that one of the meanings of the word *night* allows its collocability with *dark* and vice versa (Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah, 2003). Subsequent researchers, who have studied the occurrence of collocation, dealt with its definition in various ways, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter II. Yet, there is still no precise non-controversial, fixed definition of a collocation (Fontenelle, 1994).

Learning collocations is regarded as an important and crucial part in L2 acquisition because the meaning of a lexical item has much to do with other lexical items that are combined with it. “Not only do these associations assist the learner in committing these words to memory, they also aid in defining the semantic area of a word” (Nattinger, 1988, p.7). Ellis (2001, cited in Nation, 2001) also takes a strong position on the importance of collocational knowledge by stating that it is the essence of language learning. Along the same lines, McCarthy (1990) argues that collocation is “an important organizing principle in the vocabulary of any language” (p.12). Additionally, the significance of collocation can be clearly seen and perceived when observing the speech and writing of foreign learners who often fail to produce collocations in the proper order. This shows how important the knowledge of collocations is and calls for perception and concern by both L2 instructors and students (Carter & MacCarthy, 1988). Due to this importance, general-purpose learners' dictionaries (which include a fair number of collocations),

monolingual dictionaries of collocation and bilingual dictionaries of collocation have been compiled for the sake of helping foreign language learners deal with the difficulties they encounter “in vocabulary learning in general and collocations in particular” (Al-zahrani, 1998, p. 26) (more about the pedagogical importance of collocation in Chapter II).

Research has shown that collocation learning is neither the exclusive domain of input flooding (implicit) nor that of awareness-raising (explicit) instruction but it is rather associated with both and the two modalities interact with and influence each other. According to Ellis (1994) there are “specialized modules, the input and output collocations, which acquire the forms and regularities of the surface form of language by implicit learning principles,” and these modules become automatized by instances of frequency and memory. For Hulstijn (2001), even in the case of learning a foreign language, “a large number of collocations cannot have been learnt solely by means of explicit instruction; rather, most collocations are learned in an incremental way through repeated encounters during extensive reading” (p271). For this reason, it is recommended that foreign language learners take the advantage of the incidental nature of collocation acquisition through input flooding so that they can increase or improve their collocation knowledge.

The debate on foreign language collocation development, teaching, and learning has been to a large part around awareness-raising instruction through direct instruction and input flooding instruction through exposure to different examples for the acquisition of collocation items. The use of input flooding (implicit) or awareness-raising (explicit) instruction, contextualized and decontextualized information, passive or active, conscious awareness in learning, active and deep processing of collocation, memorization or schematic knowledge, extensive and intensive teaching or learning, the relation between quantity of instruction and subsequent collocation acquisition; the contribution of the local and/or global environment; given or inferred meaning; the role of advance organizers, the use of visual and other sensory modes, dictionary definitions and contextual understanding; and calling attention to unknown collocations in instructional framework can be added to these. The major questions asked by Nation and Meara in Schmidt (2008) about “what collocation should be learned?” and “how should it be learned?” can be answered with two major considerations taken into account: the needs of the learners and the urgency of the usefulness of the collocation items. Suggestions are made for deliberately learning collocation from meaning-focused input and output; developing fluency with collocation across the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and strategy development, such as

inferring the meaning of collocations from context, learning from collocation cards, dictionaries and assessing one's own collocation knowledge. In the meaning focused learning environment, three major conditions need to be met: work with a reasonable rate of unknown collocations, have access to a large quantity of input (input flooding), and maintain deliberate attention to the unknown collocations (awareness-raising). Other conditions that are important include making the target item recurrent through input flooding, stimulating the learner's awareness and consciousness on the unknown collocations through awareness-raising, and highlighting of new collocations as well as on collocation dictionary use. Collocation learning can be done by producing both oral and written text using learning aids such as item enhancement, the use of implicit and explicit instruction, and collaborative work.

Hunt and Beglar (2005) affirm that awareness-raising, direct collocation instruction, seems to be more effective for collocation development than those modes that rely exclusively on indirect means, i.e. input flooding, and that "connecting collocation form and meaning is best learned explicitly whereas the phonetic and phonological features and articulation of new collocations is best learned implicitly" (p 24). In addition, varying the contexts, scrupulous planning and awareness-raising, with each collocation being given salient instructional focus can provide automaticity. Many encounters with a collocation and the multiplicity of communicative examples lead to a degree of retention. However, Hulstijn et al. (1996) maintain that multiple exposures through input flooding often fail to have the expected impact on acquisition and alternative means may thus be sought to help retention.

Throughout the literature review of this study, the phenomenon of collocation will be examined from different theoretical perspectives. However, it should be briefly mentioned here that three main approaches have been the focus of many studies that dealt with the concept of collocation or word combination: the lexical approach, the semantic approach and the structural approach. These approaches were an attempt by linguists (e.g. Cruse, 1986; Fontenelle, 1994; Greenbaum, 1970; Halliday, 1966; McIntosh, 1961; Mitchell, 1971; Sinclair, 1966) to answer the question of whether collocation should be examined lexically, semantically or syntactically (for more details refer to Chapter two).

Moreover, collocations have been classified in various ways. One classification views word combinations as a continuum of automaticity. At one end of the collocational continuum are *free*

combinations whereas at the other end are *idioms* such as *kick the bucket* (Hsu, 2002). On the other hand, a broadly adopted classification of collocation among researchers is the one proposed by Benson and Ilson (1986) in which they arranged English collocation into two major classes, *lexical collocation* and *grammatical collocation*. Grammatical collocations consist of a noun, an adjective, or a verb, plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause. Lexical collocations comprise of content words. The current study has adopted Benson and Ilson's model of collocation classification. The researcher attempts to investigate the intermediate EFL learners' collocation competence by using both lexical collocations (verb-noun and adjective-noun) and grammatical collocations (verb-preposition) (The details of the study method will be presented in chapter three).

In the field of first and second language acquisition, there have been many studies, as will be seen in Chapter two, that have acknowledged the existence and the influence of collocation in language acquisition (Ellis, 1997; Fillmore, 1979; Peters, 1983; Wray, 2002). The majority of these studies support the view that language learners implement "a strategy of segmenting input speech into chunks on the basis of their repeated occurrence in certain situations, memorizing them, and recalling them for use as whole chunks when similar situations come up" (Zhang, 1993, p. 37). Most researchers in the field of first and second language acquisition highlight the fact that collocation plays an important role as scaffolding for creative construction of language (Al-Zahrani, 1998).

Experimental studies exploring ESL/EFL learners' knowledge of collocations are scarce despite the long-standing interest and increased attention of the last two decades (Aghaar, 1990; Al-amro, 2006; Al-Zahrani, 1998; Biskup, 1992; Channell, 1981; Farghal & Obiedant, 1995; Gitsaki, 1996; Howarth, 1998; Hsu, 2002; Hussein, 1990; Shehata, 2008) (more detail of these studies in Chapter two). The main focus of these empirical studies included measuring collocational knowledge in general, examining the relationship between ESL/EFL learners' collocational knowledge and their overall language proficiency, development of collocational knowledge, pedagogical aspects on collocations, and types of collocational errors. Nevertheless, all of these studies indicated that EFL/ESL learners do encounter difficulties in collocating words, as manifested by their performance (Al-Zahrani, 1998). Many researchers have attributed this lack of knowledge of collocation among learners to the neglect of instruction in classrooms (Li, 2005). Others (Howarth, 1996; Brown, 1974) explained that some language teachers are

unaware of the concept of collocation; thus they cannot direct students' attention to it when it is introduced in teaching materials.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to Nation (1990), the average lexicon of an intermediate foreign language learner should surpass the threshold of 3,000-collocations for reading unfamiliar texts. However, in the majority of foreign language environments, there exists a large gap between instructional strategies and learners' outcomes in English collocation acquisition (Conklin & Schmitt, 2007). Therefore, it can be inferred that improving EFL or ESL learners' abilities in collocation acquisition and writing should be considered a vital mission for English teachers in an Iranian context of foreign language learning and teaching. However, when it comes to selecting the most adequate collocation instruction method to use in English classrooms, diverse opinions still exist, with teachers and learners having different views on explicit (awareness-raising) and implicit (input flooding) instruction.

Being a non-native speaker, the researcher has experienced the challenges that collocations pose. Despite having studied English for many years, the researcher personally failed to achieve relatively satisfactory results on a collocation test. This indicates that achieving an advanced collocation level takes a great deal of time and effort. In addition, this collocation-related episode sparked the researcher's interest in the topic to find ways to facilitate the learning of collocation for Iranian students.

Vocabulary learning has many facets, and one of its challenging aspects consists of collocations or word combinations. For instance, we can talk about *developing*, *encouraging*, and *stimulating creativity*; however, we do not say *persuading creativity*. Other examples of acceptable word combinations are *safety procedure* or *emergency procedure*. On the other hand, we do not say *income procedure*. This word combination is not common in English.

Observing students as an instructor, I noticed that when studying collocation they tend to focus on the translation and the meaning of items, and very often they stop there. However, when these students try to use these new collocations, they face the task of combining them and at times fail to do so accurately.

An overview of the studies on English collocation instruction, particularly input flooding and awareness-raising, suggests that there is little information about how different types of collocation, particularly lexical and grammatical collocations, affect foreign language collocation retention and production. Specifically, in EFL classrooms, there is little information on how these two types of instructions facilitate high school students' collocation learning. This information is needed to understand the extent to which input flooding can be used in FL collocation instruction and the role of awareness-raising in FL collocation learning. In addition, incidental and intentional learning of different types of collocation in a foreign language setting has never been studied.

In this study, the researcher intends to compare the input flooding with awareness-raising instruction to teach collocation. The goal of the study is to directly teach or focus on an aspect of vocabulary which students often forget (collocations), to guide them to locate these combinations in reading passages, and to provide practice in combining words so that the students would eventually develop the ability to transfer this knowledge to their writing.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore ways of teaching foreign language collocation that may lead to better immediate and delayed collocation retention, while improving more active use of it in writing. The results could contribute to the improvement of instruction in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in general and the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in particular. The study investigates two ways of teaching foreign language collocations, the input flooding and the awareness-raising modes. It focuses on the extent to which the participants in the two instruction groups will achieve similarly or differently in terms of immediate and delayed retentions, and most importantly in term of writing of English collocation, first by the end of the activity and then two weeks later.

In short, the study aims at uncovering how the acquisition of collocation may be affected, comparing when participants learn and memorize the target collocations through input flooding, to when they acquire new collocation items via awareness-raising as well as how much the target collocations might appear in their written productions.