In the Name of God



The University of Sistan and Baluchestan Graduate School Department of English Language and Literature

The Effect of Teaching Lexical Collocations through Concept Mapping on Receptive and Productive Knowledge of Collocations among Iranian High School EFL Learners

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DEDICATION

To My Family

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to explore the effect of concept mapping, as a learning strategy, on the receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations of Iranian high school EFL learners. As the third aim it also explores whether teaching lexical collocations through concept mapping will be effective in terms of retention of lexical collocations.

However, there was no statistically significant difference between retention of receptive and productive collocational knowledge in the experimental group. Sixty female Iranian third-grade high school students participated in this study. They were randomly divided into two homogenous groups; control and experimental. In the experimental group, lexical collocations were taught through concept mapping, and in control one, Persian translations of the same lexical collocations were provided. Both groups received 12 sessions of instruction by the researcher. The instruments employed in this study were English Test- Beginner (proficiency test), Test of Vocabulary Items, and Test of Lexical Collocations. Data analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between the receptive and productive knowledge of collocation of those learners who were taught lexical collocation through concept mapping and those who were taught traditionally. In other words, in terms of both receptive and productive knowledge, concept mapping strategy outweighed the translation method in learning English collocations.

Keywords: lexical collocations, concept map, receptive knowledge, productive knowledge, retention of lexical collocation

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL English as a Foreign Language

ESL English as a second language

L1 First Language

L2 Second Language

SLA Second Language Acquisition

SD Standard Deviation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

It is widely accepted that lexicon plays a significant role in language learning. McCarthy (1990) stated that no matter how skilled learners are at grammar, communication will not be established without the words to convey meaning.

The significance of lexical combinations, known as formulaic language, has been stressed by several researchers in the field of vocabulary. Erman and Warren (2000), for example, analyzed written and spoken discourses of native speakers and proposed that 58.6% of the spoken English discourse and 52.3% of the written discourse are represented by formulaic expressions. Being familiar with such formulaic expressions can make the process of language learning easier for learners. Conklin and Schmitt (2007) stated that word combinations are so common in language discourse and distinguish native and non-native speakers' speech.

During the last few decades, collocation, as a subcategory of formulaic language, has received noticeable attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (Gitsaki, 1999). Scholars attempted to turn the learners' attention to multi - word expressions, like collocations. Learning collocations plays a significant and vital role in second language (L2) learning since the meaning of a word is largely

dependent on other words which are combined with it. "Not only do these associations assist the learner in committing these words to memory, but also they aid in defining the semantic area of a word" (Nattinger, 1988, p. 68).

research findings indicated that the learners' general collocational knowledge, particularly among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, was inadequate and that learning collocations is helpful for EFL learners (Hsu, 2007). Moreover, collocation's importance can be understood when evaluating the speech and writing of EFL learners who are often incapable of producing collocations in the correct form. This indicates how significant the collocational knowledge is (Carter & McCarthy, 1988). According to Koosha and Jafarpoor (2006), most Iranian EFL learners have little problems with grammar and vocabulary, but serious problems with the production of English collocations.

Learning collocations has always been challenging for EFL learners who 'look for a high degree of competence' (Wray, 2002) for improving both fluency and accuracy. Therefore, teachers and instructors should put the same emphasis on collocations in their methodology as other language aspects like pronunciation, intonation, stress, and grammar (Hill, 2000).

So far, many studies have attempted to define and describe English collocations. Zhang (1993, p. 13), for instance, defined collocations as "conventionalized and prefabricated combinations of two or more words." Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997, p. 18) state that collocation refers to "the natural occurrence of a set of fixed, identifiable, idiomatic phrases, for instance: heavy rain, strong wind, and heavy drink."

Collocations have been paid less attention than other aspects of language such as grammar and vocabulary although their number "amounts to tens of thousands" (Shokouhi & Mirsalari, 2010, p. 5). Still, they have not received sufficient attention in linguistics (Lipske, 2006), and there are "too many fixed expressions for us to simply disregard them as phenomena on the margin of language" (Jacendoff, 1995, p. 156).

Concept map is one of the new learning strategies which is related to constructivist learning theory (Duffy, Lowyck & Jonassen, 1991) and meaningful learning (Ausubul, 1968). Concept map is visualized through a graphical representation. "Concepts are usually depicted by circles or boxes, forming the nods of the new work by labeled links" (Buzzetto-More, 2007, p. 61). Based on Ausubel (1968), meaningful learning takes place when the learners are capable of connecting the new information to the previous knowledge in their cognitive structure. Novak (2001, p. 74) believes concept map is "a tool for organizing and presenting knowledge." Such knowledge is mainly semantic (Asan, 2007), so it has to be organized and presented hierarchically from the most general concept to the most specific one.

The current study, specifically investigates the effect of concept mapping, as a learning strategy, on the receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations of Iranian high school EFL learners. It also explores whether there is any difference between retention of productive and receptive knowledge of lexical collocations of the participants taught through concept mapping.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Learning collocations is considered as a significant and essential part in SLA since the meaning of a word is closely related to other words which are combined with it. In addition, plenty of researchers have proposed that collocational knowledge makes language learners capable of speaking more fluently and of processing and producing language at a much faster rate (Brown, 1974; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; Hsu & Chiu, 2008).

In spite of the significance of collocations, researchers have displayed that collocations are an inherent problem for L2 learners and one of the difficult aspects of vocabulary learning for learners of a foreign or second language including advanced learners and professional translators (Walsh, 2005; Millar, 2005; Wray, 2000).

Even though it is generally agreed that collocations are both essential and problematic for second language (L2) learners and they therefore play a significant role in SLA, learners' collocational difficulties have not been explored in detail by English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) practitioners so far (Nesselhauf, 2003). In spite of the long-standing interest and increased attention of the last two decades, empirical studies investigating ESL/EFL learners' collocational knowledge are scarce.

A review of literature indicates that only few studies have been carried out to explore the practical ways to make collocation learning easier in the language class, and much of the related work only discusses the theories of collocational competence and collocational problematic areas in the English language (Allerton, 1984; Howarth, 1998) or investigation of the need for collocation learning (Bahns, 1993; Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Lennon, 1996) and EFL/ESL learners' use

of collocations (Zughoul, 1991; Farghal & Obiedant, 1995) (as cited in Mahvelati & Mukundan, 2012). Therefore, pedagogical investigation of viable ways to enhance EFL learners' collocation learning is required as it has been proved in many studies that collocation is a big challenge for L2 learners.

Whereas lexical knowledge is focal to language and of vital significance to language learners (Zimmerman, 1997), in EFL classes in Iran state schools, teachers devote more time to grammar. It might be because many English language teachers prefer to put emphasis on grammar rather than vocabulary since grammar is a finite system, while vocabulary is not (Sheehan, 2004). And regarding teaching of vocabulary items, teachers prefer to make use of traditional lexical teaching techniques like mother tongue translation and definition. As a result, learners do not attempt to get the meaning and it is unavoidable that they may not remember the meaning of the new words, or even worse, they will not be capable of using the new words since they do not know their appropriate collocations.

Thus, the problem the present study copes with is that in many EFL classes in Iran state high schools, new words are still taught with traditional techniques. It is generally accepted that there is an essential need for carrying out new lexical teaching techniques in L2 classes. According to Siyanova and Schmitt (2008), teachers had better to make foundational changes in their lexical teaching pedagogies by concentrating on phrasal elements rather than individual words. Providing that L2 teachers and learners are to deal effectively with collocations, an important question requires to be answered here which is how collocations can be best taught practically.

Concept mapping is a relatively new technique which is helpful for presenting vocabulary in L2 classes. However, so far only a few studies have touched upon using concept mapping in learning or teaching collocations. Based on these discussions, one of the most important factors investigated in this study is the role of concept mapping strategy in Iranian EFL learners' collocational development.

In spite of the importance of collocations and also the significance of concept mapping in language teaching and learning, few studies worldwide and nationwide have been conducted in order to highlight these important aspects of language pedagogy. Moreover, few studies have investigated the effectiveness of concept mapping strategy on receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations. The present study aims at investigating the effect of concept mapping on receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations among Iranian EFL high school female learners. In other words, it is going to explore whether teaching lexical collocations through concept mapping enhances receptive and productive knowledge of collocations in comparison with teaching lexical collocations through traditional method such as translation. It also attempts to explore the retention of receptive and productive knowledge of collocations of those learners who are taught through concept mapping in order to know whether concept mapping is influential in better lexical collocation retention.

1.3 Significance of the Study

With the recognition of the significance of vocabulary, plenty of techniques for teaching and learning vocabulary have come out. It is broadly accepted that collocations are very significant parts of SLA knowledge and they are necessary to non-native speakers of English to