

Effectiveness of Lexical Collocation Instruction on Students' Collocation Knowledge

ประสิทธิผลของการสอนคำปรากฏร่วมประเภทคำศัพท์ต่อความรู้ ด้านคำปรากฏร่วมของนักเรียน

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Abstract

The current study aimed to examine the effectiveness of lexical collocation instruction in enhancing EFL students' collocation knowledge. The participants in this quasi-experimental study were 30 Mathayom 6 EFL students who were studying in the Science-Mathematic Program at a public high school. The instrument was a collocation test, administered as pre- and post-tests. Fifteen lessons of lexical collocation were taught in thirty hours of Fundamental English course. Descriptive statistics and Dependent Samples of t-test were employed to analyze the data quantitatively for comparing the participants' performance at the pre-test and post-test. The results showed that the participants' scores in the post collocation test increased significantly. The participants performed best on verb+noun collocations, but worst on verb+adverb collocations. After collocation instruction, the participants acquired the knowledge of collocations from the instruction. However, some categories of lexical collocations were found to be problematic for participants to acquire in spite of instruction.

Keywords: Lexical collocations, Collocation instruction, Collocation competence

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อทดสอบประสิทธิภาพของการสอนคำปรากฏรวมประเภทคำศัพท์ในการเสริมสร้างความรู้เรื่องคำปรากฏรวม ของนักเรียนที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างในงานวิจัยกึ่งทดลองนี้ เป็นนักเรียนที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) ชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6 หลักสูตรวิทยาศาสตร์-คณิตศาสตร์ จำนวน 30 คน ซึ่งกำลังศึกษาในโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาของรัฐบาล ข้อมูลวิจัยได้เก็บรวบรวมโดยใช้ข้อสอบเพื่อทดสอบความรู้คำปรากฏรวม ซึ่งใช้เป็นข้อสอบก่อนและหลังการสอนคำปรากฏรวม ผู้วิจัยได้ออกแบบแบบฝึกเรื่องคำปรากฏรวมประเภทคำศัพท์ จำนวน 15 แบบฝึก เพื่อสอนคำปรากฏรวมแก่กลุ่มตัวอย่าง ในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษหลัก จำนวน 30 ชั่วโมง การวิจัยนี้ใช้การวิเคราะห์ค่าสถิติพื้นฐาน (Descriptive statistic) และการทดสอบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างค่าเฉลี่ยที่กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความสัมพันธ์กัน (Dependent sample t-test) ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณเพื่อเปรียบเทียบคะแนนสอบก่อนและหลังการสอนคำปรากฏรวมของกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า คะแนนสอบหลังการสอนคำปรากฏรวมของกลุ่มตัวอย่างเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ กลุ่มตัวอย่างทำคะแนนได้ดีที่สุดในข้อสอบคำปรากฏรวมประเภทย่อย คำกริยา+คำนาม (verb+noun) แต่คะแนนต่ำที่สุดในข้อสอบคำปรากฏรวมประเภทย่อย คำกริยา+คำวิเศษณ์ (verb+adverb) จะเห็นได้ว่า หลังจากการสอนคำปรากฏรวมประเภทคำศัพท์ กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้รับความรู้เรื่องคำปรากฏรวมจากการสอนและการใช้แบบฝึกคำปรากฏรวม อย่างไรก็ตาม ยังมีคำปรากฏรวมประเภทย่อยบางประเภท ที่เป็นปัญหาแก่กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการรับรู้แม้จะได้เรียนมาแล้วก็ตาม

คำสำคัญ : คำปรากฏรวมประเภทคำศัพท์ การสอนคำปรากฏรวม ความสามารถด้านคำปรากฏรวม

Introduction

In second language acquisition, in order to acquire the new language, learners need to know words to be used in that language. It is believed that a learner with a large number of words and various types of vocabulary knowledge will have a better communicative competence which is the key aspect of language acquisition. Vocabulary knowledge is of two types: receptive and productive (Nation, 2001). Receptive ability enables EFL learners to comprehend the language while productive

ability enhances the learners' use of words for communication. According to Wei (1999), to move from receptive to productive vocabulary, learners need to be able to combine words appropriately. This aspect of productive vocabulary conforms to the main characteristic of collocations.

Collocations are defined in various ways but in a similar sense. They are two or more words which are found together repeatedly and frequently in natural written and spoken language (Benson et al., 2009; Lewis, 2000; McIntosh, 2009). For example, have an accident, convenience store, price increases, suggestion box, rise sharply and fully aware are all collocations.

According to Hill (2000), 70% of spoken and written language contain collocations; therefore, collocations deserve to be a crucial aspect of vocabulary acquisition. A word has many meanings and various linguistic functions, so one word can combine with other words in different contexts. The number of collocations is greater than words because several different collocations consist of many words (Lewis, 2000). One word can combine with other words to produce several collocations, for example, last week, hard week, spend a week, etc. Most words collocate with other words and these collocates will help learners to remember the sequences and guess their meaning through the context. According to Hill (2000, cited in Phoocharoensil, 2013), for example, the verb drink is followed by a drinkable kind of liquid, e.g. water, milk, etc.

Word combinations which are produced frequently, for example, long-term plan, mix and match and drive me crazy, are found much of both spoken and written language. Thus, in vocabulary acquisition, learning the other words that often go with the target words will facilitate learners to use those words naturally. Collocations are found in every language which has its own ways to combine the words. Lewis (1997) suggests that collocations are arbitrary. This can be different from language to language. No fixed rule can explain why collocations were created those ways, for example do laundry, but make room. The arbitrariness is considered as the difficulty to acquire collocations for EFL learners. EFL learners usually make mistakes in using English collocations because of the interference by their mother-tongue (Boonyasquan, 2006; Phoocharoensil, 2014). Inappropriate collocations and negative transference indicate learners' English proficiency.

If learning vocabulary is the initial stage of learning the second language, collocations should be taught instead of single-item vocabulary (Lewis, 2000). Even though collocation acquisition is difficult for EFL learners, many specialists propose various procedures to teach collocations (Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005; Wei, 1999).

Types of Collocations

Collocations are categorized in various concepts. Benson et al. (2009) generally classified collocations into 2 main categories: 6 types of lexical and 8 types of grammatical.

Lexical collocations consist of two or more words which are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs: e.g. verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun of noun or noun + noun, adverb + adjective, and verb + adverb, for example, take place, final round, telephone ring, stake of box, absolutely furious, and orally present.

On the other hand, grammatical collocations are phrases which consist of a dominant word: a noun, verb or adjective combined with a preposition or grammatical structure: e.g. noun + preposition, noun + to infinitive, adjective + preposition, and etc., for example, announcement about, and angry with.

Teaching Collocations

Collocations should be instructed in order to develop EFL learners' productive and communicative abilities (Lewis, 2000; Nation, 2001). Many scholars proposed various techniques to teach collocations.

Lewis (1993), in his lexical approach, suggested a pedagogical method to teach collocation. Learners must recognize collocations and memorize collocations using nonlinear recording formats: collocation tables and word trees. Wei (1999) suggestion to teach collocation was to start with building learners' awareness. Hill (2000) also pointed out that raising learners' awareness of collocations was important in collocation learning. Teachers should encourage learners to know individual words and their collocational contexts. Learners must record collocations by key words, by topics, etc. McCarthy & O'Dell (2005) suggested 3 phases to learn collocations: finding, recording, and practicing.

Related Studies

McIntosh (2009) emphasized that “No piece of natural spoken or written English is totally free of collocation”. In addition, using appropriate collocations was an important factor to achieving fluency (Nation, 2001). Therefore, many researchers tried to examine the collocation instructions and their impacts on learners’ collocation knowledge and language proficiency.

Ozgul & Abdulkadir (2012) compared the effectiveness of the teaching of lexical collocations and traditional vocabulary teaching. The students who learned lexical collocations performed better in the English test than those who learned through traditional teaching techniques.

Shooshtari & Karami (2013) investigated the impact of lexical collocation instruction on speaking ability. The pre-intermediate students were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was instructed lexical collocations while the control group was not taught any collocation. Then control and experimental groups took speaking test to assess their lexical collocation knowledge and oral proficiency. The result showed that the treatment was effective to the use of lexical collocations, except adverb + adjective collocations. Lexical collocation knowledge had positive effect on learners’ speaking proficiency.

The concepts of collocations are new in language education in Thailand; collocations are not included in the English curriculum. Boonyasquan (2006) noticed that although collocations play an important role in second language acquisition, teaching English in Thailand has limitations to implement and integrate collocation approach into the classroom. English teaching methods mostly focus on grammar and single-word vocabulary (Mongkolchai, 2008). However, more attention has been paid recently to explore Thai EFL learners’ collocation competence and to examine their relationship with English proficiency.

Some research studies on Thai learners’ acquisition of English collocations, for example, include Mongkolchai (2008) study. The researcher studied 57 Thai EFL university students’ ability in using lexical collocations. Students performed best in noun + noun collocations and worst in adverb + adjective collocations.

Kala (2012) also studied the effectiveness of collocation instruction to enhance vocabulary knowledge and writing ability. The result showed that students’

vocabulary knowledge and writing ability were enhanced through the collocation instruction.

Usen (2015) studied the effectiveness of collocation treatment to enhance grade-six students' vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary retention rate through reading tasks. The findings of the study showed that teaching collocation improved student's vocabulary knowledge and students performed best on verb + noun collocations after treatment.

Objectives

Collocations help EFL learners speak and write English in more natural and accurate ways (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). Previous studies have found that lexical collocation is related to language proficiency (Kala, 2012; Ozgul & Abdulkadir, 2012; Shooshtari & Karami, 2013). However, most EFL teachers notify that their learners usually have the problem to combine words correctly. The previous studies showed that EFL learners lacked collocation knowledge and had low productive collocation ability. In Thailand, there have been relatively few studies on lexical collocation acquisition through lexical collocation instruction. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of lexical collocation instruction on Thai EFL learners' productive collocational knowledge. Furthermore, it aimed to explore which categories of lexical collocation were problematic for learners to acquire.

Research Questions

- 1) What effects, if any, does lexical collocation instruction have on learners' knowledge of lexical collocations?
- 2) Which categories of lexical collocations are problematic for learners to acquire?

Research Methodology

Participants

This quasi-experimental study was conducted with 30 Mathayom 6 EFL students selected by the purposive sampling method from one hundred and forty seven students who were studying in the Science-Mathematic Program at a public high school in Thailand. Their ages were between seventeen-eighteen years.

They studied Fundamental English course for two hours a week. The course focused on four English skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as, vocabulary and grammatical structure.

Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this present study were 1) lexical collocation lessons and 2) a collocation test.

1) Lexical Collocation Lessons

There were 15 lexical collocation lessons consisting of 72 target collocations equally from six categories of lexical collocations, classified by Benson et al. (2009). These target collocations consisted of single-word vocabularies which were in the wordlist for participants' level, for example, respectively + aware, unforgettable + experience, idea + flow, and etc. It was assured by their teacher of English that participants were never taught to use these single-word vocabularies to produce collocations. The teacher and the researcher worked together to choose the target collocations.

The lessons included fifteen lessons; twelve lessons for teaching collocations and three lessons for writing practice. Each of the twelve lessons included six collocations of the same categories. The twelve lessons were taught to participants in three phases: finding, recording, and practicing (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). The other three lessons were used for practicing writing.

The collocation lessons were taught in 30 hours to the participants by their teacher of English. At the beginning of the instruction, the importance of collocations was introduced to the participants, as suggested by the previous studies (Wei, 1999; Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2013); EFL teachers should raise learners' awareness of the importance of English collocations. In the finding phase, participants were asked to identify and choose the appropriate collocations. Then in recording phase, participants were trained to memorize the collocations through meaning, example sentences, and making their own sentences. Next, in practicing phase, participants were encouraged to use those collocations through matching collocates with nodes and used them to make sentences. In the last three lessons, participants were encouraged to practice using collocation in paragraph writing. Writing prompts and collocations were provided as a guideline for them to write paragraphs.

2) Collocation Test

A collocation test which consisted of 72 items of fill-in-the-blank test was used to evaluate participants' collocation knowledge before and after the collocation instruction. The participants were asked to complete by filling a single word in the blank as the given Thai meaning. Below are examples of the test.

1. _____ promise (รักษาสัญญา)
2. _____ factor (ปัจจัยสำคัญ)
3. _____ competitive (ที่มีการแข่งขันในระดับสากล)
4. _____ believe (เชื่ออย่างหนักแน่น)

The tests were conducted twice as a pre-test and post-test. The score of the collocation test was 1 point for each item.

Native- and non-native English instructors were asked to validate the appropriateness of collocation test and lessons. The instructors were asked to assure that the collocations on the test and lessons were produced correctly as used by the native speakers. The incorrectly produced and presented collocations were revised. Then the collocation test was piloted with 30 Matthayom 6 EFL students who did not participate in this study. The reliability of the test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, and was found to be .754 which was acceptable. The difficulty (P) of the test was found to be .32 which was also acceptable.

Data Collection

In this study, collocation test was administered as the pre-test for forty-five minutes. The collocation test scores reflected the participants' lexical collocation knowledge before receiving treatment. A week later, the first lesson of the total fifteen lessons were given to the participants. The participants took the collocation test again after thirty hours of instruction. Descriptive statistics and Dependent Samples of t-test were employed to analyze the data quantitatively for comparing the participants' performance at the pre-test and post-test.

Results and Data Analysis

Table 1 Participants' Performances on Pre- and Post-Collocation Tests

Test	Pre-test		Post-test		D	t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
verb + noun (12 points)	1.43	1.01	4.57	2.08	3.14	8.601**
adjective + noun (12 points)	1.80	1.24	3.80	1.40	2.00	8.515**
noun + verb (12 points)	1.47	.86	2.97	1.13	1.50	7.225**
noun + noun (12 points)	2.00	1.05	3.47	1.57	1.47	5.190**
adverb + adjective (12 points)	.07	.25	.87	1.17	1.10	3.788**
verb + adverb (12 points)	.00	.00	.07	.25	.07	1.439
Overall (72 points)	6.77	2.78	15.73	5.02	8.96	10.287**

** significant at 0.01

In Table 1, the mean score of collocation test in the pre-test was 6.77, whereas that of the post-test was 15.73. The post-test score was significantly higher than the pre-test one ($t = 10.287$, $p < .01$), indicating that participants benefited from the collocation instruction. The instruction was effective in increasing participants' collocation knowledge.

In details, the results showed that participants performed best in verb + noun collocations ($t = 8.601$, $p < .01$), an increase from 1.43 in the pre-test to 4.57 in the post-test. Their post-test score on adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, and adverb + adjective also increased significantly ($t = 7.180$, 4.782 , 3.870 , and 3.000 respectively). However, participants' performance on verb + adverb collocations did not significantly improve, $X = .00$ in the pre-test and $X = .07$ in the post-test. This seemed to suggest that the collocation instruction was effective to improve collocation knowledge in most lexical categories, except verb + adverb collocations.

In order to find out more details of how the collocation instruction affected participants' knowledge of collocations, participants were divided into 2 groups based on their collocation scores, using 33% formula. The ranges of the test scores were 12.50-18.50, 20.00-28.50, and 30.00-40.50 respectively. The results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of High and Low Proficiency Participants on Pre- and Post-Collocation Test

Participants		Pre-test		Post-test		D	t
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
High (n = 10)							
verb + noun	(12 points)	1.30	1.16	4.90	1.73	3.60	7.216**
adjective + noun	(12 points)	2.10	1.52	4.40	1.07	2.30	6.866**
noun + verb	(12 points)	1.20	.63	2.80	1.32	1.60	4.707**
noun + noun	(12 points)	2.20	1.03	3.70	1.42	1.50	4.025**
adverb + adjective	(12 points)	.20	.42	1.60	1.28	1.40	3.280*
verb + adverb	(12 points)	.00	.00	.10	.32	.10	1.000
Overall	(72 points)	7.00	3.43	17.50	3.72	10.50	10.247**
Low (n = 10)							
verb + noun	(12 points)	1.20	.42	4.20	2.70	3.00	3.558**
adjective + noun	(12 points)	1.80	1.14	3.70	1.95	1.90	3.943**
noun + verb	(12 points)	1.60	.52	3.30	1.25	1.70	4.295**
noun + noun	(12 points)	1.70	1.16	3.80	1.99	2.10	3.280**
adverb + adjective	(12 points)	.00	.00	.80	1.23	0.80	2.058
verb + adverb	(12 points)	.00	.00	.00	.00	N/A	
Overall	(7 points)	6.30	2.21	15.80	7.63	9.50	4.427**

** significant at 0.01

From Table 2, the high proficiency group performed significantly better on the post-collocation test, an increase from 7.00 to 17.50 ($t=10.247$, $p<.01$). Their post-test scores on verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, and adverb + adjective collocations increased significantly. They performed best on verb + noun collocations ($t=7.216$, $p<.01$). Their pre-test scores on verb + adverb were not significantly different from their post-test scores. Obviously, from the test results, the high proficiency group also had difficulty acquiring verb + adverb collocations.

The low proficiency group also performed significantly better on the post-test, an increase from 6.30 to 15.80 ($t=4.427$, $p<.01$). They also performed best on verb + noun collocations ($t=3.558$, $p<.01$). However, their performance in verb + adverb

collocations did not change, $\bar{X} = .00$ on both pre-and post-test. Also their scores on adverb + adjective did not increase significantly on post-test ($\bar{X} = .80$). So the low proficiency group did not acquire verb + adverb and adverb + adjective collocations.

From the test results, it might be possible to conclude that lexical collocations could be taught to enhance the participants' collocation knowledge. The participants could acquire almost all categories of the lexical collocation, except some categories which were found to be problematic for participants to acquire. Verb + adverb collocations were problematic for all participants, including high and low proficiency groups. Adverb + adjective collocations were problematic only for low proficiency group.

Discussion

This quasi-experimental study aimed to examine the effectiveness of lexical collocation instruction on the students' knowledge of lexical collocation. It was found that the collocation instruction was effective to improve the participants' collocation knowledge, reflected in the participants' overall post-test scores which increased significantly after instruction. However, there were certain categories which were found to be problematic: verb + adverb and adverb + adjective collocations.

The study found that the participants could acquire 5 categories of lexical collocations: verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, and adverb + adjective collocations. They learned these collocations, practiced using them, and acquired them. The participants gained the highest score on verb + noun collocations. There was one category which all participants did not acquire: verb + adverb. Their performances on verb + adverb collocations did not improve; both high and low proficiency groups had difficulty acquiring the knowledge of verb + adverb collocations.

The difficulty in acquiring verb + adverb collocations might result from the fact that verb + adverb collocation is relatively uncommon in English texts. This was confirmed by an examination of 3 randomly selected EFL-reading texts from the participants' course books, consisting of 1,047 words. The researcher found only 4 sets of verb + adverb collocations.

The finding that the collocation instruction was effective to improve participants' collocation knowledge was in line with the previous studies (Shooshtari & Karami, 2013; Usen, 2015). Furthermore, the finding which showed that participants performed best in verb + noun collocations was in line with some previous studies (Shooshtari & Karami, 2013; Usen, 2015). For example, Usen (2015) found that teaching collocation improved student's vocabulary knowledge and students performed best on verb + noun collocations after the instruction.

Noteworthy, even though participants benefited from the collocation instruction, their collocation scores in the post-tests were still unsatisfactory. From the total of 72, their scores increased from 6.77 in the pre-test to 15.73 in the post-test, which were only one fourth of the total. This might be because collocations is a new issue for the Thai learners because in Thailand English teaching methods mostly focus on grammar and single-word vocabulary (Mongkolchai, 2008).

The analysis of the collocational errors on participants' collocation test showed that the participants' collocational errors might be the result of the negative transfer of the first language. In Thai, for example, learners can say good knowledge, but not in English. Some English words have similar meaning in Thai; learners might make collocational errors when they produced English collocations from Thai meaning. An example, the words, trip and tour have only one word in Thai: *kārdōēnthāng* but in English there are these two different words which are not interchangeable: business trip but adventure tour. The same interference was found in the studies of Boonyasquan, 2006; Mongkolchai, 2008; Phoocharoensil, 2014; Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2013. Phoocharoensil (2014) found that most Thai EFL learners often depended upon collocational patterns in Thai and transferred the patterns from Thai to English. Thus, collocational errors were found where Thai and English patterns were different. Collocation errors might be because of the differences between their mother tongue and English.

Conclusion

In short, based on the findings, collocations could be taught to improve students' collocation knowledge. All participants could acquire 5 from the total of 6 categories of lexical collocations: verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, and adverb + adjective. Only verb + adverb collocations were found

to be problematic for them. So the collocation instruction which was presented explicitly in English classroom could improve their collocation knowledge.

Although these 72 collocations presented in the current study consisted of single-word vocabularies which were suitable for participants' level, some were found to be problematic especially verb + adverb. Single-word vocabulary teaching is to present the meaning to students while collocation teaching is to encourage them to produce English naturally and fluently. So, in order to enhance learners' collocation knowledge, teacher should teach collocations and provide more opportunities for learners to practice using collocations.

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