The Effect of Implicit Input Enhancement on Learning Grammatical Collocations

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Abstract

Collocation is known as one of the most problematic areas in learning a second language and it seems that if one has tendency to improve his or her communication ability in another language, the elaboration of collocation using competence is among the most important issues. This study investigated the role of implicit input enhancement in teaching grammatical collocations for Iranian EFL learners. Two groups of Iranian intermediate EFL High School students in a language institute in Ardebil participated in this study. One group was assigned as control group and the other as experimental that received treatment sessions. A Twenty-item multiple choice pre-test was administrated at first for both control and experimental groups. 10 sessions of treatment through bolding the target grammatical collocations in the reading passages were provided for experimental group. Post-test was administrated for both control and experimental groups after treatment sessions. The scores of post-test were analyzed using t-test. The results of t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups. The findings demonstrated that enhancing the collocational input is not significantly beneficial for EFL learners.

Introduction

Knowing the meaning of a word for using it appropriately is not enough; the learner needs to pay attention to the immediate context that it is used in. Collocations are "word combinations involving two lexical items, one of which is selected arbitrarily by the other lexical item to convey a particular meaning." (Melcuk, 1998, p. 14). Collocations are very important for the competence of second language learners and "have attracted substantial attention from researchers on second language acquisition in the past 15 years" (Pei, 2008, p.72). Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997) divide collocations into two categories in their dictionary. "Lexical" and "grammatical" collocations represent two different but related aspects of collocations since they include both lexis and grammar. Grammatical collocations are characterized by eight basic types of collocations of the main word like a noun + -an adjective and a verb plus to as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Grammatical collocations

Collocation	Example
Noun + preposition	Exception to
Noun + to-infinitive	A decision to do it
Noun + that-clause	He made a promise that he would do his best
Preposition + noun	By chance
Adjective + preposition	Keen on movie
Adjective + to-infinitive	It's essential to type the letter
Adjective + that-clause	It was necessary that all of us attend
Verb + to-infinitive	They started to work

Sharwood Smith (1991) defines input enhancement as "the process by which language input becomes salient to learners" (p. 118). In other words, input enhancement can be used to draw learners' attention to the target forms by using special techniques such as, **bolding**, *italicizing* and CAPITALIZING. White (1998) has also stressed the importance of input enhancement. The suggestion is that input enhancement can help L2 acquisition in two main ways: by drawing learner's attention to certain properties of L2, and by helping them "unlearn" their incorrect analyses of L2. Thus, input enhancement appears to affect learner's knowledge and performance in the second language, and it seems reasonable to expect language teachers and syllabus designers to make use of input enhancement.

Previous studies have found that learning collocations is problematic for L2 learners (Ellis, 1996; Lewis, 1997; Produromou, 2003; Pei, 2008; Shehata, 2008; Miyakoshi, 2009; Vural, 2010). If learners have a lack of the knowledge of the collocations, they will have face problems decoding and encoding meanings of words (Vural, 2010).

Collocation knowledge can help EFL learners' writing skill and reading comprehension ability (Lin, 2002; Liu, 2000; Hsu & Chiu, 2008). In fact, it can be claimed that EFL students need to use collocations appropriately in order to be able to speak and write fluently and accurately (Jaen, 2007). Nation (2001) explained that

collocation learning can be incidental through implicit instruction such as extensive reading.

The term collocation was coined by Firth (1957). He defined it as "the company that words keep" (p. 183). Sheheta (2008) states that "The origin of the term collocation is the Latin verb *collocare*, which means *to set in order to/ to arrange*" (p. 25). McIntosh, Francis, and Poole (2009) suggested another definition for collocations as "the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing" (p. v).

Zare and Zare (2016) categorize English collocations into two groups: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocation refers to combination of just noun, verb, adverb, and adjective, while grammatical collocation refers to a combination of noun, verb, adverb and adjective with preposition or other parts of speech.

According to Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2009), collocation exists in nearly all domains of English. Relatively, without benefiting from collocation no one can speak or write naturally. With regard to students selecting the appropriate collocation can be very helpful in their speech and writing way more naturally, and sound more native-like speaker and writer. An EFL learner talking about strong coffee may make him/herself understood, but it requires more effort on the part of the listener and ultimately creates a barrier to communication. Poor collocation lead to lower marks in exams the pinpoint meaning of a word can be identified by the words surrounded it and by the use of collocation it can be combined with the core word. A will express him/herself much more clearly when he/she uses collocation and be able to convey more precise point in detail (*Oxford Collocations Dictionary*, 2009).

Smith (1993) introduced two types of input enhancement: positive and negative. Positive input enhancement put the notice to the correct forms in the input, such as visual input enhancement of a reading text in which target forms are bold, underlined, capitalized, or italicized. Negative input enhancement would highlight error forms, an example of this would be error flags.

Ellis (1997) mentioned that there have been "swings in the educational practice (which) makes it clear that there is no simple answer to which of these methods is 'best'" (p. 291). According to Ellis (1993, 1995), input enhancement is an effective option in language teaching. Its role is to make learners become aware of some specific target form(s) in learning situation and to draw their attention to them.

Krashen (1989) argued that implicit vocabulary learning is beneficial and that was explained through the operation of his input hypothesis which relies on providing a comprehensible input that leads to the natural acquisition of new words. Hulstjin (2005) defined incidental learning as "The unintentional picking up of information" (p. 132). Lee and Benati (2007) claimed that input enhancement is useful for language development; however, input enhancement does not guarantee that input becomes intake unless language learners are able to notice the input.

Based on the statements of Khanchobani (2012), one of the ways of directing learners attention to formal aspects of language is visual input enhancement, which is an implicit and unobtrusive means to increase the perceptual salience of the target forms via a variety of typographical techniques such as underlining, bolding, highlighting, etc.

Goudarzi and Moini (2012) also conducted a study investigating the effect of input enhancement on Iranian upper intermediate learners. There were three groups of participants, 20 in each that under three different conditions received reading passages; collocations were bolded, L1 glossed collocations were included and non highlighted collocations (text only) were provided. The results of the study showed that using L1 glossed collocations was the most effective. This parallels the results of the study of Rassaei and Karbor (2012) which was conducted also on Iranian EFL learners; the results also suggest that input enhancement techniques were less effective than form comparison techniques. Fahim and Vaezi (2011) examined the effectiveness of input visual/ textual enhancement on the acquisition of verb+noun collocations of Iranian L2 learners. The results of their study showed that input enhancement is equally beneficial as the conventional method of teaching.

Karami (2013) investigated the effect of implicit and explicit instruction of verb + noun collocations on 36 Iranian pre-university students. The participants of the study were divided into two groups; the explicit instruction group was the experimental group while the implicit instruction group was considered as a control group. The results of the post-test indicated the superiority of the explicit method over the implicit one. Rezvani (2011) claimed that the learners who received input enhancement treatment made significant gains with regard to the acquisition of grammatical collocations.

The previous studies examined the role of input enhancement in teaching language. The implicit teaching displays less effect on learning, especially in collocation learning. These studies do not rely on grammatical collocation as the aim of this study which investigates the role of implicit input enhancement in learning grammatical collocations (in this study the preposition + noun, verb + to-infinitive, and noun + preposition) in EFL context for intermediate Iranian learners. It studied the effect of input enhancement in teaching grammatical collocations in order to see to what extent learners can be benefit from implicit input enhancement to learn collocation as a needed skill for speaking second language and decreased the errors of learners in using collocation. Previous studies studied the effect of enhancing the collocation and especially lexical one.

Methodology

Participants

40 Iranian intermediate female EFL learners were chosen from two classes of Chekad institute in Ardebil city in Iran. Having used pre-test, post-test experimental

designs, the participants were assigned as control and experimental groups, arbitrarily.

Instruments

A proficiency test on grammatical collocations was used as pre-test prior to treatment and another one as post-test at the end of the experiment; two parallel, twenty-item, multiple choice tests. Multiple passages were provided for learners, bolding the target grammatical collocations.

Procedure

The study took place in academic year 2017-2018. Two intermediates EFL classes (n=40) were sampled and considered as the control (n=20) and experimental groups (n=20). The pre-test was administered to both groups at the beginning of the study in 15 minutes. In ten sessions, the grammatical collocations were taught in the experimental group using input enhancement method and the target words were bold in the passages. Control group did not get any treatment. After treatment sessions post-test were given to both groups. Scores were out of twenty and SPSS software (T-test) was employed.

Results

In order to show that both groups are at the same level pre-test was administrated. The results showed that there is no significant difference between those two groups. Table.1 displays the descriptive statistics. (Table 1)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the of the pretest

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.316	.577	.407	38	.686	.15000	.36832	-.59562	.89562
Equal variances not assumed			.407	37.41	.686	.15000	.36832	-.59600	.89600

Group Statistics

group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
experimental	20	10.500	1.23544	.27625
control	20	10.350	1.08942	.24360

The results of the post-test are analyzed in order to see if there is any significant difference between collocation learning and implicit input enhancement. Data are displayed in the Table 2.

Independent Samples Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

t-test for Equality of Means

F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
.232	.633	.57	38	.581	.15000	.26926	.39508	.69508

Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	experimental	20	10.5000	.88852	.19868
	control	20	10.3500	.81273	.18173

The results of the T-test showed that there are no significant differences between the two groups. Also, matched T-test showed that learners in the experimental group did not benefit from implicit teaching with input enhancement (bolding target collocation). Results are illustrated in Table .3

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of matched T-test

Paired Samples Correlations Table. 3. Matched T-test				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair1	pretest & posttest	20	.479	.032

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair1	pretest	10.5000	20	1.23544	.27625
	posttest	10.5000	20	.88852	.19868

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the effect of implicit input enhancement on grammatical collocation learning among EFL learners with intermediate level. It was hypothesized that there is no difference between the groups who received treatment by enhancing target collocations or control group. As the results of the study revealed, the participants in the both groups performed

similarly in pre-tests. Also after treatment sessions for experimental group and post-test administration, as shown, there are not any differences between two groups which mean the null hypothesis is not rejected. The input enhancement cannot benefit learners to learn grammatical collocations.

Based on Rasaee and Karbor (2012), input enhancement techniques were less effective than form comparison techniques. Miyakoshi (2009) studied the effect of explicit instruction on the acquisition of verb + noun collocations with advanced and intermediate Japanese L2 learners. Based in the results of Miyakoshi explicit instruction improves collocations' competence in the target language.

Mahvelati and Mukundan (2012) carried out a study to investigate the effectiveness of both explicit and implicit instruction of collocations. Based on their results two groups acquired collocations during treatment but explicit group can benefit more than implicit one. Sadat Kiaee, Heravi Moghaddam, and Moheb Hosseini (2013) examined the effects of collocation instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Results of paired-sample t-test indicated that the students in the experimental group outperformed the control group in reading comprehension. Also Goudarzi and Moini (2012) suggested that using L1 glossed collocations was the most effective.

Although the previous studies examine both types of implicit / explicit teaching at the same time and discussed all types of collocation or just lexical collocation, the results are similar to this study in terms of ineffectiveness of implicit input enhancement. Therefore, the results of the present study are in line with the previous research findings demonstrating that input enhancement were less effective in learning all types of collocation in intermediate levels of L2 learning.

Conclusion and implications

Collocation is an important feature of language for second and foreign language learners, however, it is extremely problematic in this area since there are a large number of them, and there is no special rule to learn them. The purpose of this study was to investigate effects of implicit input enhancement teaching on learning grammatical collocation in Iranian EFL context. Comparing the results of pre-test and post-test demonstrated that visual input enhancement does not have any significant effect on learning collocation. But the reason behind remains unknown .Based on previous studies and this study, it can be beneficial for Iranian EFL teachers to use more explicit ways in order to teach collocation to EFL learners.

Although the researchers of the study have done their best to complement a faultless study, as far as possible, this study has its own limitations. First, the participants were not in large scale. Second, all of the participants were female. Third, the study examined just the implicit way of teaching which future researches can investigate both or only explicit teaching for all types of collocations. The last but not least was that only grammatical collocation was taught. In other words, further research is required to examine the role of enhancing input in all types of collocation for all levels of EFL learners.

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