
The Effect of Word Exposure Frequency through Story Reading and Story Listening on Learning Collocations

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of word exposure frequency through story reading and story listening on learning collocations. To conduct the study, 50 female learners were homogenized using Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2001) and were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group at Safiran Khazar English language Institute in Sari. During the treatment, the researcher provided the participants in both groups with the same stories. The only difference was that in experimental class the learners read the stories themselves, but in the control class the instructor read the stories to the learners. The stories were enriched with the target collocations placed in pre- and post-tests. The learners in both classes encountered the same collocations for 16 sixty-minute sessions. The data were collected through the pre-test and post-test, which were both designed by the researcher. The researcher piloted the test before the instruction on other learners to ensure that the test was reliable. The data obtained from the administration of the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using SPSS software. The result of this study showed that the word exposure frequency through story reading and story listening had statistically significant effect on collocation learning by Iranian intermediate EFL learners and also the reading group performed better than the listening group in learning collocations.

Key words: collocations, story listening, story reading, word exposure frequency

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, language learning has become a prominent section in the world of education and attracted much care and focus. In this regard, learning vocabulary is the phase which always causes problems, since it is a fundamental part in the process of learning a language. It is the case that receives attention from both teachers and educators (Nesselhauf, 2003). Since the conventional methods of teaching vocabulary no longer appeared to be efficient, the researchers suggested ways for learning multiword phrases and chunks. Moreover, the importance of focusing on the association between lexical items in order to develop vocabulary learning has been highlighted. Collocations have recently received increased attention in applied linguistic studies; however, still relatively little is known about the way in which collocations are used by speakers of foreign languages (Elgort, 2011).

Collocation is a universal linguistic phenomenon. Words are always used together. They always present themselves in collocation. It is no exaggeration to say that none of the natural languages is free of collocation. In fact, words seldom occur in isolation. Collocation is not only a necessary element of language but also an outstanding feature that makes language specific and correct (McCarthy, 1990). There are so many reasons for storytelling to young learners, it combines all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing in a meaningful context. Linguistically stories present grammar, vocabulary and speech in a meaningful context which support comprehension. It also fosters cultural awareness and offers values and beliefs. It stimulates learner's curiosity and encourages them to learn more about the world. For young learners stories offer an adorable way of contextualizing, they also introduce new language and make it comprehensible and memorable. Retelling or remembering the plot of story can foster learners cognitive and social skills; cognitive activities such as identifying characters, comparing their behaviors and reactions during story and defining concepts, lead to develop concrete thinking, and cognitive activities such as: reasoning, finding solution, and creative ending lead to develop abstract thinking.

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writing in a meaningful context. Linguistically stories present grammar, vocabulary and speech in a meaningful context which support comprehension. It also fosters cultural awareness and offers values and beliefs. It stimulates learner's curiosity and encourages them to learn more about the world. For young learners stories offer an adorable way of contextualizing they also introduce new language and make it comprehensible and memorable. An increase of the students' knowledge of collocation will result in an improvement of their oral and listening comprehension and their reading speed. In an effort to make the advanced students achieve a better feel of what is acceptable and what is appropriate (Swan, 1996). The present study was designed to investigate the effects of word exposure frequency through storytelling and story reading on learning collocation.

Research Questions

- 1-Does word exposure frequency through story reading have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning?
- 2-Does word exposure frequency through story listening have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning?
- 3-Is there any difference between story reading and story listening in collocation learning?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Background

Collocations have recently received increased attention in applied linguistic studies; however, still relatively little is known about the way in which collocations are used by speakers of foreign languages. Firth (1968) defined collocation as the habitual association of words with each other or group of words together. According to Hoey (2005) collocation refers to the syntagmatic attraction between two (or more) lexical items: morphemes, words, phrases or utterances i.e. each word in a language prefers certain lexical contexts over others, i.e. that any given word tends to co-occur with certain words more often than it does with others. As McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) believed, collocations are natural combinations of words and refer to the way English words are closely jointed with each other.

Collocation not only plays a crucial role in language production and comprehension, but also functions as a key indicator of L2 learners' overall proficiency in the field of second language acquisition. In order to achieve native-like competence and fluency, second and foreign language learners need to be aware that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce collocations. Collocations are arbitrary and unpredictable and that makes it difficult for EFL learners to cope with them. Despite the arbitrary nature of collocations, having this knowledge is necessary for learning English and producing fluent speech and complete writing (Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1985).

According to Cowie (1992), English collocation is important in receptive as well as productive language competence. Also Carter and McCarthy (1988) believed, English collocations are useful not only for English comprehension but for English production. They claimed that by memorizing collocational groups, students would have the idea about certain lexical restrictions. Collocations teach students expectations about which sorts of language can follow from what has preceded. Students will not have to go about reconstructing the language each time they want to say something but instead can use these collocations as pre-packaged building blocks (Carter & McCarthy, 1988). McCarthy (1990) claimed that "in vocabulary teaching there is a high importance of collocations", also that "the relationship of collocation is fundamental in the study of vocabulary, and collocation is an important organizing principle in the vocabulary of any language" (p.12). It seems that proficiency in language learning is related to collocation knowledge. Lewis (2000) argued that increasing learners' collocation competence is the way to improve their language as a whole. Language learners need to gain collocation competence in order to become language proficient (Hussein, 1990).

Story-listening is used for aural comprehensible input in the comprehension-based program. It is especially helpful for reluctant readers. Listening to stories increases interest in book reading, in addition to providing the linguistic competence needed for book reading (Shehata, 2008). A powerful and effective way to increase the level of vocabulary acquisition in an EFL context is storytelling. Motivation and interest of the students will be developed by the use of storytelling method (Moon & Maeng, 2012). Cameron (2001), storytelling is a kind of oral activity that has been designed for both listening and involvement, and it can make children participate in class activities. Hronova (2001) believed that, reading story books by teachers in the classroom is a very suitable activity which is recommended in educational literature, and it is beneficial for children's language learning. According to Baker and Green (1985) Story reading provides a fluent stream which enables children to listen to, and then process and reproduce it. Learners can understand stories even if they do not know each word, since they can use the predictive power of the text which help them to guess the meaning; they also use the gesture, the posture, and the intonation of storyteller to process and understand the meaning.

Retelling or reading a story can foster learners cognitive and social skills; cognitive activities such as identifying characters, comparing their behaviors and reactions during story and defining concepts, lead to develop concrete thinking, and cognitive activities such as: reasoning, finding solution, and creative ending lead to develop abstract thinking (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). Stories are considered as an important part of everyday lives like the food we eat and water we drink. "Stories help us to understand who we are, to make sense of the confusing swirl of everyday life, to digest and transform

our experiences. They can also serve to develop reflection and critical thinking.” (Booth, 1994, p.89). Stories can make our world. Life is full of stories, and the life stories include different characters, places and `events. In fact, stories can provide the human beings with helpful knowledge, and experience and they can make the life meaningful.

Frequency of word occurrence is a continuing aspect of incidental vocabulary acquisition and a facet of representations of human memory. Frequently occurring words in a text were easier to learn and remember (Teng, 2014). Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001) discovered that learners with low English levels needed more encounters to learn a word than learners with high English levels. Rott (1999) asserted that, six encounters with a target word was an adequate number. Waring and Takaki (2003) highlighted the value of higher repetition rates and pointed out that none of the word meanings that were encountered fewer than eight times would be retained after three months. Number of times that a new word is encountered or word exposure frequency could affect learning and retention of word knowledge (Horst, 2005). Learning of various dimensions of new word knowledge: knowledge of orthography, association, grammatical functions, syntax, meaning and form. All dimensions of word knowledge improved with repeated encounters of words, confirming that word exposure frequency provided significant results in vocabulary learning and retention (Webb, 2007). According to Zimmerman (2009) the number of times that a new word was encountered when reading affected learning and retention of vocabulary knowledge. Repeated word exposure is more effective when coming from both repeated readings of a book and repetition of a word in a story. Frequency of exposure and explanation of target words are important factors in increasing vocabulary gain (Nation, 2001). Ellis (1995) suggested that repeated exposure to the regularities of words’ surface phonological and orthographical features in spoken and written input helps learners to recognize and produce those forms subsequently. Repeated exposure to words’ formal features in input is crucial if words are to be established in learners’ lexicons (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

2.2 Related Studies

Lin (2002) surveyed the impact of collocation instructions on receptive and productive collocation competence of high-achievers and low-achievers in a group of EFL high school students. The results indicated that all students made more progress in receptive collocation tests than productive ones, but low-achievers performed better in productive tests after collocation teaching. Both groups held positive attitudes toward collocation teaching activities.

Waring and Takaki (2003) explored incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading the graded reader. In their controlled study, 25 words belonging to different frequency groups were substituted with pseudo-words. They suggested that at least 20 encounters would be needed to gain full knowledge of a new word. Overall, greater gains were found for words with increased repetitions.

Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004) explored the impact of storytelling on increasing the reading comprehension among young learners. The outcome of their study revealed that storytelling was effective for improving the comprehension skills among the children. They concluded that the children who listened to the stories had greater reading comprehension than those children who just read the stories.

Lee (2009) investigated the effects of collocation-based English vocabulary instruction on the four language skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) with Korean middle school students. Lee found that the effect of collocation based instruction was less significant on receptive skills (listening and reading) while more obvious in productive skills (speaking and writing). Ahn (2009) investigated EFL students' use of collocations by using their reading and writing. He analyzed lexical and grammatical collocations within the students' summaries and found that the more proficient readers used a greater variety of lexical collocations than the less proficient ones.

Rahimi and Momeni (2012) examined the effects of teaching vocabulary through collocation and concordance techniques on language proficiency. The results showed that teaching vocabulary has an effect on the improvement of language proficiency and vocabulary teaching, be traditional methods such as translation, explanation and definition or new trend of collocation teaching of the words, can bring about a significant growth in language proficiency. Bae (2012) implemented letter- and story- writing tasks in EFL children and investigated ten cohesion markers, including collocations, used in the letters and stories. Collocations were found to be one of a few markers that significantly influenced the writing quality across the two tasks.

3. Method

3.1 Sample/ Participants

The current study was planned to be carried out among intermediate EFL learners at Safiran Khazar Language Institute in Sari, Iran, studying New Interchange 2 student’s book by Jack C. Richards. Fifty learners were selected through OPT and the participants were females, aged between 16 and 20.

3.2 Instruments

OPT (Oxford Placement Test)

This test was administered to determine the proficiency level of the students to make them homogenized. This test was developed by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. The students were required to answer the test during a 60 minutes session.

Pre- and Post-Test

Before starting the treatment, the learners in both groups asked to take the same pre-test, consisting 50 collocation items, extracted from the book "English Collocations in Use" (Intermediate). The items include "multiple choice" and "fill in the blanks"; this is because the students' knowledge in collocations is to be investigated not their ability to produce the language. The post-test was the same as pre-test and held at the end of instructional period.

3.3 Procedure

In order to come up with a reasonable answer for the research questions, the following procedure was carried out. Firstly, by using OPT, as a criteria for choosing participants, 50 homogenized adult EFL learners (N=50) chosen from intermediate classes at Cambridge Language Institute. After the test, those whose scores fall between one standard deviation over or below the mean score will be selected for the study. Next, the researcher randomly chooses class A with 25 participants as the experimental group to receive input through reading stories and class B with 25 subjects as the control group to receive input through listening to stories. First a pre-test given to the students which consisted of 50 collocation items chosen from the book English collocations in Use (Intermediate). During the treatment, the researcher provided the participants in both groups with the same stories. The only difference in experimental class that the learners read the stories themselves, but in control class the instructor read the stories to the learners. The stories are enriched with the target collocations placed in pre and post-test. The learners in both classes encountered the same collocations for sixteen 60 minutes sessions. The meaning of the new words explained and defined in English by the teacher in both classes. After instructional period, a post-test performed in order for the researcher to analyze the result.

4. Results and Discussion

After administering the language proficiency test, the researcher considered 50 out of 64 participants as homogenous members based on their scores of OPT ranging from 28 to 36 (intermediate level). The 50 homogenized participants were randomly put into 2 groups of story listening and story reading.

The first research hypothesis of this study was as follows:

H01-The word exposure frequency through story reading doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Collocation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Reading Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Reading Pre	25	6.00	12.00	8.4400	1.68523	2.840
Reading Post	25	22.00	28.00	25.5600	1.35647	1.840
Valid N (list wise)	25					

The means of the pretest and posttest are 8.44 and 25.56 respectively. The result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test is presented below.

Table 2

The Result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test for Collocation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Reading Group

	Reading Post - Reading Pre
Z	-4.390 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

As it can be seen in table 2 above, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that the word exposure frequency through story reading doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning.

The second research hypothesis of this study is as follow:

H02-The word exposure frequency through story listening doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Collocation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Listening Group

	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Std. Devia- tion	Vari- ance
Listening_Pre	5 6.00	11.00	8.280	1.54164	2.377
Listening_Post	5 9.00	15.00	11.88	2.04776	4.193
Valid N (list wise)	5				

The means of the pretest and posttest are 8.28 and 11.88 respectively. The result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test is presented below.

Table 4

The Result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test for Collocation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Listening Group

	Listening_Post - Listening_Pre
Z	-4.403 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

As it can be seen in table 4 above, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that the word exposure frequency through story listening doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning.

The third research hypothesis of this study is as follow:

H03-There is no significant difference between story reading and story listening in collocation learning.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Listening and the Reading Groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Listening_Post	25	9.00	15.00	11.8800	2.04776	4.193
Reading_Post	25	22.00	28.00	25.5600	1.35647	1.840
Valid N (list wise)	25					

The means of the listening and the reading groups are 11.88 and 25.56 respectively. The result of the Mann-Whitney U Test is presented below.

Table 6

The Result of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the Comparison of the Listening and the Reading Groups

	Listening_Reading
Mann-Whitney U	3.020
Wilcoxon W	325.000
Z	-6.094
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

As it can be seen in table 6 above, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that there is no significant difference between story reading and story listening in collocation learning; the reading group performed better than the listening group did.

5. Conclusion

According to the obtained data and analysis procedure; for first research hypothesis, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that the word exposure frequency through story reading doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning. For the second research hypothesis, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that the word exposure frequency through story listening doesn't have any statistically significant effect on collocation learning. Finally for the third research hypothesis, the obtained Sig value is less than .05 ($P < .05$). Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that there is no significant difference between story reading and story listening in collocation learning; the reading group performed better than the listening group did. So the researcher concluded that the word exposure frequency through story reading and story listening have statistically significant effect on collocation learning and also the reading group performed better than the listening group in learning collocations. As it was revealed, the word exposure frequency through story reading and story listening have effect on collocation learning. This effect can be due to several reasons:

First, as Lewis (2000) claimed that the learning chunks of words helps language learners develop their communicative competencies better than learning words in isolation. Second, as Moon and Maeng (2012) asserted a powerful and effective way to increase the level of vocabulary acquisition in an EFL context is storytelling. Motivation and interest of the students will be developed by the use of storytelling method. Third, according to Cameron (2001), storytelling is a kind of oral activity that has been designed for both listening and involvement, and it can make children participate in class activities. He asserts that eye contact between the teacher and the children can play an essential role in storytelling because eye contact is a kind of behavior which is natural in communication, and it can increase the communication ability among the students in the classroom.

Finally, some researchers believe that reading story books by teachers in the classroom is a very suitable activity which is recommended in educational literature, and it is beneficial for children's language learning (Lewis, 1997; Robins, 1967). Except the entertainment value of storytelling, it may have some value as an educational tool and the role of storytelling has been highlighted for many teachers and scholars (Nation, 2001).

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