

Rote rehearsal and L2 learners' use of collocations

Pawel Szudarski and Kathy Conklin

University of Nottingham

Numerous studies (e.g., Pawley and Syder 1983; Sinclair 1991) have emphasized that native-like use of language involves the ability to recognize and produce formulaic sequences – larger elements of linguistic material that are used as whole units. Yet research on the use of English as a second/foreign language (e.g., Altenberg and Granger 2001) shows that different chunks are either misused or underused by learners, even when they represent advanced levels of proficiency. Consequently, the acquisition of such chunks needs to be supplemented with formal instruction. However, little is known about which types of instruction are the most effective ones.

To explore the impact of instruction on L2 language learning, this psycholinguistic study investigated the effects of two types of instruction on the acquisition of verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations by L1 Polish learners of English (N=26). More specifically, rote rehearsal (repeating L1 and L2 sentences with embedded collocations) and enhanced rote rehearsal (repeating the same sentences with graphically enhanced collocations). Fourteen native-speakers were also included for comparison purposes. Eighty target collocations, representing frequent and infrequent chunks, were chosen for the study. Both immediate and delayed post-tests (a lexical decision task) were administered to measure the effects of the instruction on learners' collocational knowledge. Results revealed that rote rehearsal can improve L2 learners' performance, with the addition of input enhancement not resulting in better knowledge. Importantly, learners' gains were found to be short-termed and their size was mediated by the frequency of the target collocations.

The study concludes with practical implications on how L2 learners' lexical development can be promoted through formal instruction.