

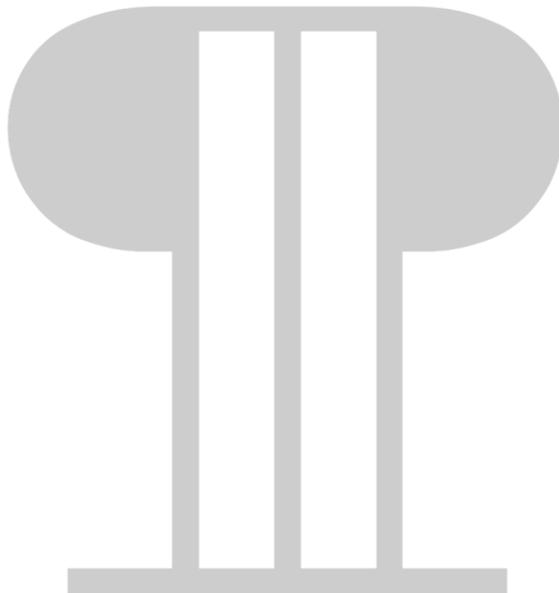
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Task Involvement and Input Type in the Acquisition of Verb–Noun Collocations

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Task Involvement and Input Type in the Acquisition of Verb-Noun Collocations

**Introduction**

Within the field of vocabulary acquisition, collocation-specific research is a relatively new area. It is generally agreed that knowledge of collocation is vital for the development of fluency in second language (L2) learners, and that collocation instruction should feature prominently in classrooms (Howarth, 1998; Lewis, 2000; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005; Nesselhauf, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; Wray, 2000). However, there is little consensus on how this should be done, due to, on the one hand, the wealth of collocations available to be learned, and on the other, the dearth of research into ~~how and~~ what to teach ~~and how~~ (Koprowski, 2005; Lewis, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003; ~~Koprowski, 2005~~; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; Wray, 2000). This research project, ~~therefore, will~~ expands upon the small body of literature ~~which that~~ explores the effectiveness of teaching collocations by investigating the relationship between input type (receptive and productive) and collocation acquisition, while simultaneously drawing upon ~~the~~ involvement load hypothesis literature, ~~in an effort~~. ~~The project aims~~ to discover whether the degree of task involvement ~~impacts upon~~ affects input effectiveness in the teaching of verb-noun collocations. Participants ~~shall be~~ drawn from an adult ~~English as a Second Language (ESL)~~ setting and from two proficiency groups: intermediate and advanced.

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**Research Question**

The question framing this research is: ~~Is~~ there a relationship between input type and involvement load in the acquisition of verb-noun collocations by intermediate and advanced ESL learners?

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**Definition of Collocation**

## ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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For the purpose of this research, the term collocation shall be used according to Nesselhauf's (2003) definition. ~~She identifies of~~ collocations as word combinations in which there is some arbitrary semantic restriction, and ~~further~~-verb-noun collocations as combinations in which the verb is restricted from combining with all syntactically and semantically possible nouns, while the noun is ~~not~~unrestricted. An example of this is *take a picture*, where *take* cannot combine with semantically similar words, such as *\*take a movie*. When both the verb and the noun are restricted (e.g., *sweeten the pill*), this is identified as an idiom, ~~thereby falling which falls~~ outside the boundaries of this research (~~e.g. *sweeten the pill*~~), as do free combinations, in which neither the verb nor noun are restricted, as in *want a car* (Nesselhauf, 2003, p. 226).

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### Problem

Multiple studies have revealed the prevalence of collocation errors of all phraseological types (*verb-noun*, *adjective-noun* and *noun-noun*) in second language (L2) learners' output (Fan, 2009; Granger, 1998; Howarth, 1998; Wray, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003; ~~Fan, 2009~~Wray, 2000), suggesting that even advanced learners ~~are struggling~~ struggle to cope with this essential ~~vital~~-aspect of fluency in their target language. Since it is widely recognised that knowledge of collocation is essential-vital for second language (L2) learners' development of fluency and accuracy ~~development~~ (Wray, 2000), it is also commonly asserted that explicit collocation instruction should hold a prominent place in classroom language instruction (Laufer, 1991; ~~Wray, 2000~~; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; ~~Wray, 2000~~). ~~Unfortunately~~ However, the literature ~~cannot~~ has yet to reach consensus on how best to teach collocation, ~~due~~ primarily because of the shortage of research on this ~~subject~~ issue, ~~thus offering; thus there is~~ little guidance for ~~either~~ teachers, ~~or~~ and material developers (Nesselhauf, 2003; Koprowski, 2005; ~~Nesselhauf, 2003~~; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009).

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~~Thus~~Therefore, the problem is defined as learners' poor control of collocations ~~due~~owing to a lack of information on how best to structure tasks for maximum acquisition.

### Suitability for Research

#### The ~~G~~gap

While comparisons between receptive and productive tasks and the involvement load hypothesis feature prominently in current single-word vocabulary research (Griffin & Harley, 1996; ~~Webb, 2005~~); ~~there have been~~ few studies ~~have~~ ~~which analyse~~analysed the effects of either of these phenomena on collocation acquisition (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009), and none ~~which that~~ combine the two. Of those studies ~~which that have do~~investigated the relationship between input type and collocation learning, many ~~applied~~ computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies such as concordancers and online glosses (~~Sun & Wang, 2003~~; Chan & Liou, 2005; ~~Sun & Wang, 2003~~); ~~while~~ Of those ~~that opt for~~studies that focused on more traditional instruction methods, the majority ~~were~~ conducted in ~~English as a Foreign Language EFL~~ settings, often using translation as a primary feature of tasks, ~~and~~; thus ~~their~~ drawing conclusions ~~which~~ may not be valid for an ESL setting. ~~My~~This research, therefore, fills a ~~yawning~~significant gap through its investigation of the relationship between input type and involvement load on the acquisition of verb-noun collocations.

#### Relevance and Significance

~~I~~It is useful to analyse how different levels of involvement might positively or negatively ~~impact upon~~influence the effectiveness of ~~the~~input, ~~since~~as the ~~time restrictions of the classroom and the~~ wealth of useful vocabulary and collocations ~~that could be taught and the time restrictions of the classroom~~, require teachers to ~~carefully~~consider the efficiency of tasks ~~carefully in order~~; ~~so as~~ to supply their students with maximum beneficial ~~vocabulary~~ exposure, while ~~minimizing~~ wasted cognitive effort. ~~And, since~~ ~~this impact~~Since ~~previous studies have shown that the relationship between task involvement and the~~

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## ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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~~effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition has been proven in previous studies to vary~~ between ~~learners of different proficiency levels~~ (Webb, 2005; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009), research ~~which~~ incorporat~~ing~~es more than one proficiency group becomes necessary. By comparing intermediate and advanced learners' performance on discrete tasks designed to be ~~implementable~~ ~~implemented~~ as part of a classroom-based language lesson, ~~it is hoped that~~ the results of this research ~~will~~ ~~could~~ have direct application in task choice or design for language classrooms, ~~and in~~. In the longer term, ~~that this study~~ might contribute to the small but growing body of literature informing how best to teach collocations.

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### Practicality and Potential for ~~A~~analysis

Expanding on the work of Webb and Kagimoto (2009), who used simple receptive and productive language tasks to measure collocation acquisition, this research will design tasks ~~which~~ ~~that~~ incorporate three levels of task involvement per input type: a total of ~~six~~6 tasks. Through these tasks, ~~quantitative~~ data ~~will be collected~~ on the ~~depth~~, ~~that is the~~ ~~levels ranging from orthographic to semantic~~, of acquisition resulting from each of the treatments ~~shall be collected quantitatively~~. The tool for measuring the depth of acquisition will draw on the work of Richards (1976) and Nation (2001), who identified~~y~~ knowing a word as entailing pronunciation, orthographic, morphosyntactic, semantic, register and collocational knowledge. These levels of knowledge will be tested ~~in order~~ to give a more complete picture ~~as to of~~ the benefits ~~or~~ ~~and~~ drawbacks of the different tasks. An additional delayed post-test will measure rate of decay, providing a ~~rounder~~ ~~detailed~~ picture of acquisition success. Results will be comparable with current research on collocations, and ~~in~~ the broader vocabulary acquisition field.

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### Research Journey

#### Importance of ~~T~~eaching ~~C~~ollocations

## ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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-Initial reading confirmed the observation that learners of all proficiencies struggled with collocations. They were found to use fewer collocations, and a severely restricted range of collocations (Fan, 2008; Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003; Howarth, 1998), and to be more accepting of combinations found unacceptable by native speakers (NSs) of the language (Granger, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). It has also been shown that processing time of collocations by intermediate and advanced learners was is significantly slower than for NSs-native speakers (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). However, considering that the difference between intermediate and advanced learners' processing time and native-likeness of judgement was is also significant, it is clear that collocational knowledge can be acquired as the L2 develops.

### Implicit or Explicit Teaching

-Initial reading also prompted the dismissal of my-any focus on improving students' noticing of collocations in-through reading texts, as various researchers showed-have shown that incidentally acquiring meaning through reading is a slow process (Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998; Waring & Takaki, 2003), and is highly dependent on the number of repetitions and quality of context (Nation & Wang, 1999; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Webb 2007, Webb 2008). Therefore, it was decided to refocus on explicit instruction.

### Involvement Load and Traces

-Further searching revealed studies which-that suggested that learning collocations, even highly idiomatic combinations, as discrete items was manageable for both intermediate and advanced students (Boggards, 2001). CALL-based studies of collocation also revealed significant gains on the part of learners using glosses and concordancers (Sun & Wang, 2003; Chan & Liou, 2005). Of particular interest is Boggards' (2001) found-finding that idioms containing known lexical items were are easier more easily acquired than more obscure single-word lexical items, which suggests-ing that some multi-wordk lexical items are easier

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## ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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~~to accommodate~~ within ~~the~~ learners' pre-existing vocabulary. ~~(also This is known as tracing).~~ CALL-based studies of collocation learning also revealed significant gains on the part of learners using glosses and concordancers (Chan & Liou, 2005; Sun & Wang, 2003). ~~On the other hand~~ In their study, Sun and Wang (2003) found that concordancers, which involve a high involvement load, yielded better results for collocation acquisition than glosses. ~~It therefore became apparent that traces~~ Taken together, the literature on involvement load and traces suggests that traces, whether they are the result of involvement load or otherwise, are as relevant for collocation acquisition as they are for single-word vocabulary items.

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### Input ~~Type~~ and ~~Depth~~ of ~~Knowledge~~

~~Two other key concepts came to the fore~~ emerged in my research at about this time during the research. ~~These were:~~ input type and vocabulary depth. Webb (2005), researching single-word vocabulary acquisition, found that advanced learners benefited more from productive input, such as rote copying or simple sentence writing, while intermediate learners ~~on the other hand~~ showed a preference for receptive input, such as glossed sentence reading. This finding was later tested on collocations by Webb (2009), with similar results by Webb (2009). ~~However vocabulary knowledge is not as simple as knowing or not knowing a word.~~ Most vocabulary researchers agree that there is a difference between vocabulary used receptively and that used for production, and that this distinction is not dichotomous, but rather exists as a continuum (Melka, 1997; Read, 2000). ~~However~~ In other words, vocabulary knowledge is not as simple as knowing or not knowing a word. Thus, Nation (2001) has suggested that various elements of word knowledge should be taken into consideration considered when judging someone's proficiency with a lexical item. For this reason, it was decided that, in addition to testing the efficiency of tasks which that utilise input type and involvement load research, depth studies should be employed in the design of

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## ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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the information-gathering tool. This ~~will mean~~ involves testing various levels of word knowledge, ~~in order~~ to determine the extent of acquisition. ~~Further~~ ~~With this in mind,~~ research into input hypothesis and depth studies is ~~being conducted currently~~ ongoing.

### Conclusion

This investigation of the possible relationship between input type and involvement load in the acquisition of verb-noun collocations by intermediate and advanced L2 learners in an ESL setting will contribute to knowledge of collocation acquisition. The focus on verb-noun collocations, and selection of participants from intermediate and advanced proficiencies, makes this research comparable with previous studies, thereby offering a more complete picture of collocation acquisition as a result of discrete tasks. Finally, by designing these tasks to reflect classroom realities, results gained will have direct relevance for practicing teachers, and potentially contribute towards choices made by material designers, as they seek to afford collocations their rightful place in the language classroom.

ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS

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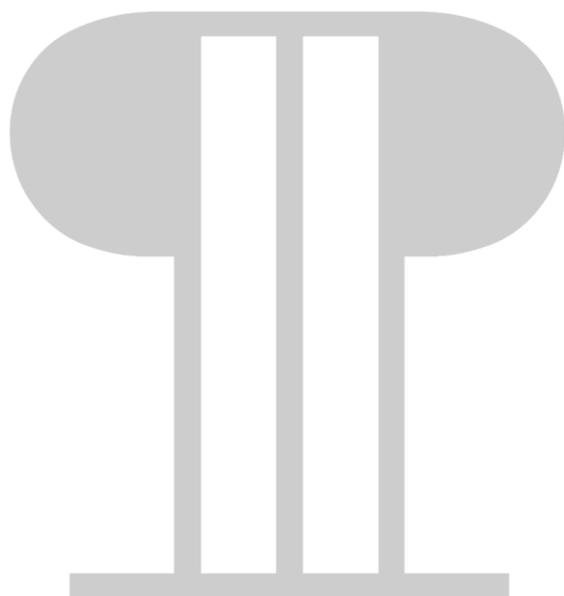
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McCarthy, M. & O'Dell, F. (2005). *English collocations in use*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

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Melka, F. (1997). Receptive vs. pProductive aspects of vocabulary. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy* (pp. 84-102). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139524759>

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Nesselhauf, N. (2003). The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 223-242. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/24.2.223> Retrieved from <http://apli.oxfordjournals.org>

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Siyanova, A. & Schmitt, N. (2008). L2 learner production and processing of collocation: A multi-study perspective. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 64(3), 429-458. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.64.3.429> Retrieved from <http://muse.jhu.edu>

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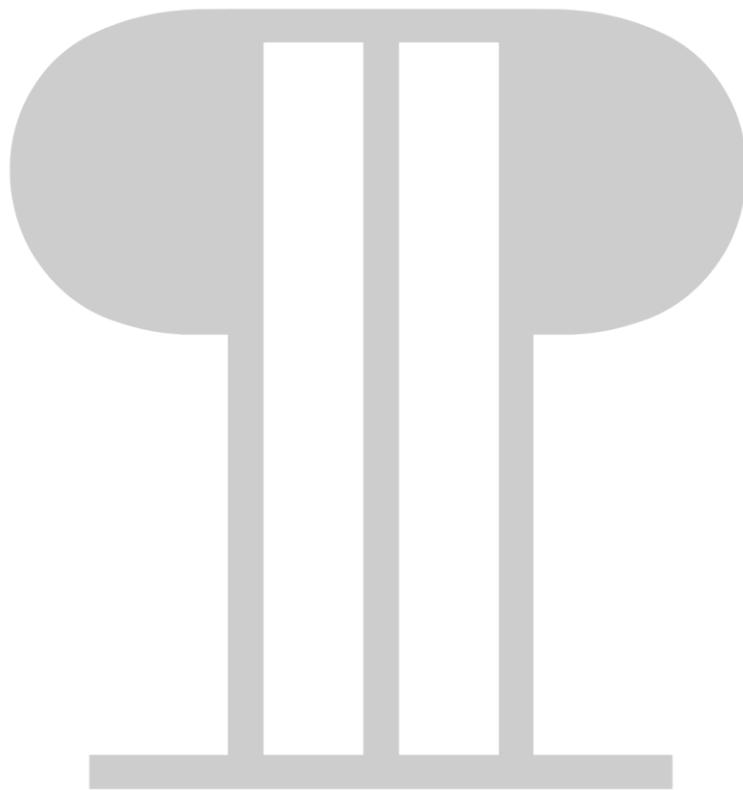
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Task Involvement and Input Type in the Acquisition of Verb–Noun Collocations



### Task Involvement and Input Type in the Acquisition of Verb–Noun Collocations

Within the field of vocabulary acquisition, collocation-specific research is a relatively new area. It is generally agreed that knowledge of collocation is vital for the development of fluency in second language (L2) learners, and that collocation instruction should feature prominently in classrooms (Howarth, 1998; Lewis, 2000; McCarthy & O’Dell, 2005; Nesselhauf, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; Wray, 2000). However, there is little consensus on how this should be done, due to, on the one hand, the wealth of collocations available to be learned, and on the other, the dearth of research into what to teach and how (Koprowski, 2005; Lewis, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; Wray, 2000). This research project expands on the small body of literature that explores the effectiveness of teaching collocations by investigating the relationship between input type (receptive and productive) and collocation acquisition, while simultaneously drawing upon the involvement load hypothesis literature. The project aims to discover whether the degree of task involvement affects input effectiveness in the teaching of verb–noun collocations. Participants are drawn from an adult English as a Second Language (ESL) setting and from two proficiency groups: intermediate and advanced.

#### **Research Question**

The question framing this research is: Is there a relationship between input type and involvement load in the acquisition of verb–noun collocations by intermediate and advanced ESL learners?

#### **Definition of Collocation**

For the purpose of this research, the term collocation shall be used according to Nesselhauf’s (2003) definition of collocations as word combinations in which there is some arbitrary semantic restriction, and verb–noun collocations as combinations in which the verb is restricted from combining with all syntactically and semantically possible nouns, while the

noun is unrestricted. An example of this is *take a picture*, where *take* cannot combine with semantically similar words, such as *\*take a movie*. When both the verb and the noun are restricted (e.g., *sweeten the pill*), this is identified as an idiom, which falls outside the boundaries of this research, as do free combinations, in which neither the verb nor noun are restricted, as in *want a car* (Nesselhauf, 2003, p. 226).

### **Problem**

Multiple studies have revealed the prevalence of collocation errors of all phraseological types (*verb–noun*, *adjective–noun* and *noun–noun*) in L2 learners' output (Fan, 2009; Granger, 1998; Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003; Wray, 2000), suggesting that even advanced learners struggle to cope with this essential aspect of fluency in their target language. Since it is widely recognised that knowledge of collocation is vital for L2 learners' development of fluency and accuracy (Wray, 2000), it is also commonly asserted that explicit collocation instruction should hold a prominent place in classroom language instruction (Laufer, 1991; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009; Wray, 2000). However, the literature has yet to reach consensus on how best to teach collocation, primarily because of the shortage of research on this issue; thus there is little guidance for teachers and material developers (Koprowski, 2005; Nesselhauf, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009). Therefore, the problem is defined as learners' poor control of collocations owing to a lack of information on how best to structure tasks for maximum acquisition.

### **Suitability for Research**

#### **The Gap**

While comparisons between receptive and productive tasks and the involvement load hypothesis feature prominently in current single-word vocabulary research (Griffin & Harley, 1996; Webb, 2005), few studies have analysed the effects of either of these phenomena on collocation acquisition (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009), and none that combine the two. Of those

studies that have investigated the relationship between input type and collocation learning, many applied computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies such as concordancers and online glosses (Chan & Liou, 2005; Sun & Wang, 2003). Of those studies that focused on more traditional instruction methods, the majority were conducted in English as a Foreign Language settings, often using translation as a primary feature of tasks; thus their conclusions may not be valid for an ESL setting. This research, therefore, fills a significant gap through its investigation of the relationship between input type and involvement load on the acquisition of verb–noun collocations.

### **Relevance and Significance**

It is useful to analyse how different levels of involvement might positively or negatively influence the effectiveness of input, as the time restrictions of the classroom and the wealth of useful vocabulary and collocations that could be taught require teachers to consider the efficiency of tasks carefully in order to supply their students with maximum beneficial vocabulary exposure, while minimising wasted cognitive effort. Since previous studies have shown that the relationship between task involvement and the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition varies between learners of different proficiency levels (Webb, 2005; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009), research incorporating more than one proficiency group becomes necessary. By comparing intermediate and advanced learners' performance on discrete tasks designed to be implemented as part of a classroom-based language lesson, the results of this research could have direct application in task choice or design for language classrooms. In the long term, this study might contribute to the small but growing body of literature informing how best to teach collocations.

### **Practicality and Potential for Analysis**

Expanding on the work of Webb and Kagimoto (2009), who used simple receptive and productive language tasks to measure collocation acquisition, this research will design

tasks that incorporate three levels of task involvement per input type: a total of six tasks. Through these tasks, quantitative data will be collected on the *depth* of acquisition resulting from each of the treatments. The tool for measuring the depth of acquisition will draw on the work of Richards (1976) and Nation (2001), who identified knowing a word as entailing pronunciation, orthographic, morphosyntactic, semantic, register and collocational knowledge. These levels of knowledge will be tested to give a more complete picture of the benefits and drawbacks of the different tasks. An additional delayed post-test will measure rate of decay, providing a detailed picture of acquisition success. Results will be comparable with current research on collocations and in the broader vocabulary acquisition field.

### **Research Journey**

#### **Importance of Teaching Collocations**

Initial reading confirmed the observation that learners of all proficiencies struggle with collocations. They were found to use fewer collocations and a severely restricted range of collocations (Fan, 2008; Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003), and to be more accepting of combinations found unacceptable by native speakers of the language (Granger, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). It has also been shown that processing time of collocations by intermediate and advanced learners is significantly slower than for native speakers (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). However, considering that the difference between intermediate and advanced learners' processing time and native-likeness of judgement is also significant, it is clear that collocational knowledge can be acquired as the L2 develops.

#### **Implicit or Explicit Teaching**

Initial reading also prompted the dismissal of any focus on improving students' noticing of collocations through reading texts, as various researchers have shown that incidentally acquiring meaning through reading is a slow process (Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998; Waring & Takaki, 2003) and is highly dependent on the number of repetitions and

quality of context (Nation & Wang, 1999; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Webb 2007, 2008).

Therefore, it was decided to refocus on explicit instruction.

### **Involvement Load and Traces**

Further searching revealed studies that suggested that learning collocations, even highly idiomatic combinations, as discrete items was manageable for both intermediate and advanced students (Boggards, 2001). Of particular interest is Boggards' (2001) finding that idioms containing known lexical items are more easily acquired than more obscure single-word lexical items, which suggests that some multi-word lexical items are easier to accommodate within learners' pre-existing vocabulary. This is known as *tracing*. CALL-based studies of collocation learning also revealed significant gains on the part of learners using glosses and concordancers (Chan & Liou, 2005; Sun & Wang, 2003). In their study, Sun and Wang (2003) found that concordancers, which involve a high involvement load, yielded better results for collocation acquisition than glosses. Taken together, the literature on involvement load and traces suggests that traces, whether they are the result of involvement load or otherwise, are as relevant for collocation acquisition as they are for single-word vocabulary items.

### **Input Type and Depth of Knowledge**

Two other key concepts emerged during the research: input type and vocabulary depth. Webb (2005), researching single-word vocabulary acquisition, found that advanced learners benefited more from productive input, such as rote copying or simple sentence writing, while intermediate learners showed a preference for receptive input, such as glossed sentence reading. This finding was later tested on collocations by Webb (2009), with similar results. Most vocabulary researchers agree that there is a difference between vocabulary used receptively and that used for production, and that this distinction is not dichotomous, but rather exists as a continuum (Melka, 1997; Read, 2000). In other words, vocabulary

knowledge is not as simple as knowing or not knowing a word. Nation (2001) has suggested that various elements of word knowledge should be considered when judging proficiency with a lexical item. For this reason, it was decided that, in addition to testing the efficiency of tasks that utilise input type and involvement load research, depth studies should be employed in the design of the information-gathering tool. This involves testing various levels of word knowledge to determine the extent of acquisition. With this in mind, research into input hypothesis and depth studies is ongoing.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation of the possible relationship between input type and involvement load in the acquisition of verb–noun collocations by intermediate and advanced L2 learners in an ESL setting will contribute to knowledge of collocation acquisition. The focus on verb–noun collocations and selection of participants from intermediate and advanced proficiencies makes this research comparable with previous studies, thereby offering a more complete picture of collocation acquisition as a result of discrete tasks. Finally, by designing these tasks to reflect classroom realities, results gained will have direct relevance for practicing teachers, and potentially contribute towards choices made by material designers as they seek to afford collocations their rightful place in the language classroom.

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