

EFFECTS OF MEANING- AND FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION ON THE ACQUISITION OF VERB-NOUN COLLOCATIONS IN L2 ENGLISH

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of meaning- and form-focused instruction on the acquisition of collocations by L1 Polish learners of English as a foreign language. Forty-three intermediate learners were divided into three groups: meaning-focused instruction plus focus-on-forms (MFI plus), meaning-focused instruction (MFI only) and a control group. During a three-week treatment, the two experimental groups were provided with two different types of instruction. The MFI plus group read stories that contained target collocations and additionally completed explicit exercises focused on collocational patterns, while the MFI only group read the same stories but no mention of collocations was made. The target collocations were verb-noun combinations with frequent delexical English verbs (e.g. 'give birth' or 'take a step') likely to be known by participants receptively but causing difficulty in language production. Three tests tapping into collocational competence at different levels of vocabulary mastery revealed that MFI followed by Focus on Forms (FonFs) is an effective way of enhancing learners' collocational knowledge at both the productive and receptive level, whereas MFI only does not seem to lead to much improvement. The study is discussed in relation to prior research on L1 influence on L2 vocabulary acquisition and offers insights into language pedagogy.

Keywords: collocations; formulaic sequences; SLA; EFL learners; form- and meaning-focused instruction

Introduction

At present, as a result of the recent increase of corpus-based studies on formulaicity, it has become clear that the use of formulaic language by second language learners needs to be addressed in language instruction. Formulaic language is an area of linguistic study dealing with larger sequences of language, formulae, idioms, proverbs, collocations and other phrases that are memorized and stored as whole units in the mental lexicon (Wray, 2002; Schmitt, 2004). According to Wray (2002, p.9), a formulaic sequence is 'a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated, that is,

stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar'. It is an oft-cited definition that highlights the most crucial aspects of the phenomenon.

One specific type of formulaic sequence is collocation. Collocations are word partnerships that are defined differently depending on which perspective the researcher takes. In general, as Barfield and Gyllstad (2009) point out, there are two distinct approaches to collocations: the frequency-based tradition and the phraseological tradition. In the frequency-based tradition, scholars have concentrated on frequency and they have based their findings on statistical analyses of word co-occurrences (e.g. Sinclair, 1991). In the phraseological tradition, on the other hand, collocational analysis relies on syntactic and semantic investigations of lexical co-occurrence and inspirations for it are drawn mainly from European phraseology (e.g. Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2005). According to Nesselhauf (2005), word combinations form a continuum ranging from free and transparent phrases, through collocations to invariable (frozen) idioms. At the same time, it must be stressed that these two traditions overlap at points and as a result a hybrid approach to collocations is present in the field as well. This study follows the hybrid approach and collocations are conceptualized as word partnerships frequently co-occurring within a given word span (Sinclair, 1991).

As far as second language learners' collocational competence is concerned, research (e.g. Granger, 1998) indicates that non-native speakers of English tend to overuse specific types of lexical items which help ensure communicative success. Hasselgren (1994) has coined the term 'lexical teddy bears' while referring to such items. Also Bahns and Eldaw (1993) focused on advanced learners' command of lexical patterns (verb-noun collocations such as 'serve a sentence'). On the basis of their results from a written translation task and a cloze test, the authors concluded that students' knowledge of collocation did not develop equally with their general vocabulary knowledge. Another relevant study in the context of learners' collocational competence is Howarth (1998). He compared the use of collocations by native and non-native speakers of English in academic compositions and his analysis revealed that the learners' level of collocational knowledge is lower than that of native speakers. According to Howarth, learners struggle with restricted collocations (for instance, 'reach a conclusion') whose collocability is limited by phraseological restrictions that arbitrarily stipulate how words can be combined. Likewise, Nesselhauf (2003) discusses the importance of restrictions imposed on different lexical combinations. She distinguishes between free word combinations (e.g. 'read a

newspaper'), where only semantics determines the combinability of the words, and collocations which are formed according to arbitrary conventions (e.g. 'reach a decision' not 'meet a decision', but 'meet a deadline' not 'reach a deadline'). Many of such lexical relationships are implicitly known by native speakers but might cause problems for second language learners, especially if they have no equivalent in their mother tongue.

As emphasized by Schmitt (2010), collocations and other formulaic sequences help develop fluency in language and are processed faster than novel combinations (Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin & Schmitt, 2011). Naturally it is impossible for second language learners to learn all collocations that native speakers use. Yet, as Boers et al. (2006) have shown, the efficient use of formulaic sequences contributes to proficiency in a second language and therefore the promotion of multi-word units in the language classroom should become an important aspect of formal instruction.

Form- and meaning-focused instruction

As Loewen (2010) explains, instructed second language acquisition can be divided into meaning-focused instruction (MFI) and form-focused instruction (FFI). According to Ellis (2001a), in MFI learners focus on what they want to communicate and language is treated as a tool rather than an object of study. Form-focused instruction (FFI), on the other hand, is understood as 'any systematic attempt to enable or facilitate language learning by manipulating the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which these occur' (Housen & Pierrard 2005, p.3). One of the first scholars who discussed FFI was Long (1991) who distinguished between focus-on-form (FonF), involving a focus on form within meaning-oriented language use, and focus-on-forms (FonFs), in which linguistic forms are taught in isolation as discrete points. In his discussion of these issues, Ellis (2001b) also makes a distinction between incidental (spontaneous) FonF and planned FonF, the latter being characterized by drawing learners' attention to preselected linguistic forms.

So far most of the empirical work on FFI has focused on grammar. However, as Loewen (2010) notes, other aspects of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation or pragmatics can be tackled through FFI as well. As far as vocabulary is concerned, Laufer (e.g. 2006, 2010) has been a strong advocate for FFI, especially its FonFs variants. In her 2006 study, she demonstrated higher gains in FonFs conditions in comparison with FonF conditions. On the

basis of these results, Laufer (2006, p.149) claims that form-focused instruction has a major importance in any learning context and is 'indispensable' for L2 vocabulary learning. In a similar study, File and Adams (2010) compared vocabulary learning as a result of integrated and isolated FFI conditions. Their results revealed that both these kinds of treatment were more effective than incidental learning through exposure only and it seems that both integrated and isolated FFI are equally effective since there were no significant differences between the two treatments. However, these two studies used individual words as target vocabulary and, as already stressed, recent research suggests that a large part of the lexicon is formulaic and is built from multi-word units such as collocations, idioms or phrasal verbs. Therefore, the study presented here addresses the dearth of empirical work on the effects of different types of instruction on second language learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences.

Instruction in collocations

It is generally accepted that incidental learning of collocations from exposure by second language learners is rather slow (e.g. Laufer, 2010). Consequently, there is a need to supplement it with formal instruction in the classroom. However, as already indicated, little is known about which types of FFI lead to positive changes in phraseological competence. There are very few scholars who have investigated the effectiveness of formal instruction in collocations. One of the first studies addressing this issue is Laufer & Girsai (2008) in which the authors compared the acquisition of verb-noun collocations (e.g. 'settle scores' or 'fulfil an ambition') by Israeli EFL learners in three different conditions: meaning-focused instruction (MFI), non-contrastive form-focused instruction (FFI) and contrastive analysis and translation (CAT). In the MFI group, the reading of texts containing target collocations was followed by a group discussion but learners' attention was not brought to any of the target items. In the FFI group, learners received form-focused instruction since they were given multiple-choice and fill-in-the-gaps exercises focused on the target collocations. The CAT group also received form-focused instruction but it was conceptualized as translating collocations from L1 (Hebrew) into L2 (English) and vice versa. In addition, learners from the CAT group were also informed about differences between the two languages in terms of collocational patterns. In order to assess the effectiveness of the instruction in these three conditions, the learners' collocational knowledge was evaluated through translation tests tapping into the form (L1-L2 translation) and meaning (L2-L1 translation) of the target collocations. These tests were administered a day after the treatment (an immediate post-test) and a week later (a delayed post-test). Results showed that

the CAT group had significantly higher scores than the other two groups on all tests and the lowest scores were obtained by the MFI group. Laufer and Girsai conclude that a contrastive analysis is the most effective way of dealing with word combinations whose phraseological patterns differ in learners' respective L1 and L2. As a result, the authors recommend that teachers should focus on syntagmatic relationships between words, so that learners become more aware of cross-linguistic differences in terms of phraseology and consequently avoid producing miscollocations.

Webb and Kagimoto (2009) also address the issue of learning collocations by EFL learners. In their experiment, Japanese learners were divided into two groups that received a receptive treatment, reading verb-noun collocations (e.g. 'ensure safety' or 'draw blood') together with their L1 translations in three glossed sentences, and a productive treatment where the same glossed sentences were presented but the learners' task was to fill in the gaps with collocations. There was also a control group that completed only a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test consisted of only one test which measured the receptive knowledge of collocations. The post-test, in contrast, tapped into four different aspects of collocational competence: the knowledge of whole collocations and the knowledge of specific collocates at both the productive and receptive level. The post-test was immediate as it was administered when the treatment ended. Results indicated that both the receptive group and the productive group gained significantly more than the control group but there were no differences in the effectiveness between the two treatments. However, when Webb and Kagimoto divided their participants into two groups on the basis of their proficiency in English, the results became slightly more complex. At the higher proficiency level, students who completed the productive cloze task outperformed significantly those who performed the receptive reading task. On the other hand, at the lower proficiency level, students who completed the receptive reading task outperformed significantly those who performed the productive cloze task. The authors conclude that both the receptive reading task and the productive cloze task are effective in terms of improving EFL learners' knowledge of collocations but, at the same time, they call for more research into the effects of different types of tasks on learning collocations.

Another study relevant to collocational competence of second English language learners is Yamashita and Jiang's (2010) psycholinguistic experiment with Japanese ESL and EFL learners. Participants from both groups were asked to complete an acceptability-judgement task

in which both congruent and noncongruent collocations were used. The authors discuss the notion of congruency in the context of cross-linguistic differences between English and Japanese. Collocations are defined as congruent if they share lexical elements in the two languages (e.g. 'hot tea' in both English and Japanese). On the other hand, incongruent collocations are word combinations that are comprised of different lexical elements in the two languages (e.g. 'kill time' in English and its equivalent in Japanese realized as 'crush/break time'). As a result, such collocations cannot be translated word for word from L1 into L2 because this would lead to ungrammatical phrases. According to Yamashita and Jiang (2010, p.652), 'the learning of incongruent collocations will lag behind that of congruent ones', for incongruent collocations require more processing effort. The authors hypothesized that EFL learners would produce a congruency effect; that is, react more slowly to incongruent collocations and make more errors with them. With regard to ESL learners, Yamashita and Jiang predicted that the congruency effect was likely to play a lesser role than in the case of EFL learners due to a different kind of input that the ESL context affords.

In the experiment, each participant was presented with 24 congruent collocations and 24 incongruent collocations, as well as 48 implausible word combinations which served as fillers. Individual words comprising the target collocations were among the most frequent vocabulary in English and consequently they were assumed to be known by participants. The learners' task was to decide whether the presented items were acceptable English expressions. Results showed no congruency effects for native speakers, as they responded equally well to both congruent and incongruent collocations. Similar results were found with ESL learners since the congruency effect did not affect their reaction times. However, it influenced their accuracy because they made more errors with the incongruent collocations. Interestingly, the congruency effect was found in EFL learners' responses. They made more errors with the incongruent collocations and they needed more time to process the incongruent collocations. A possible explanation for these results is the fact that ESL learners receive a lot of exposure to authentic English discourse that contains incongruent collocations. As a result, processing such items does not seem to cause delays. EFL learners, on the other hand, often rely only on classroom instruction where they suffer from input poverty and as a result, incongruent collocations are processed by them more slowly and less accurately.

Similarly to Laufer and Girsai (2008), Yamashita and Jiang (2010) suggest that educators and language teachers should pay more attention to differences in collocations between L1 and L2 and point out that contrasting languages in terms of phraselogical patterns is likely to benefit second language learners. The question arises, thus, how such differences in the use of collocation can be highlighted in formal instruction so that learners' collocational competence, especially at the productive level, is enhanced. This is what the present study aims to explore.

The study

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does collocational knowledge of learners change as a result of two kinds of treatment: meaning-focused instruction plus FonFs (the MFI plus group) and meaning-focused instruction only (the MFI only)?
2. Is there a difference in the effectiveness of the two treatments measured as improvement in collocational knowledge?

Participants

The study took place in Poland, in an EFL context, with 43 learners of English from three intact classes (two experimental groups with 13 students each and a control group with 17 students). All participants shared a mother tongue (Polish) and were eighteen-year-old students at secondary school. The study was conducted in the second semester of their final year. The students had studied English for at least six years and they were all preparing to take the Matura exam, a national exam of English corresponding to B1/B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2001).

During the study, the students followed a regular programme of learning which meant that each day they had several lessons devoted to different subjects. As far as English is concerned, all participants had three 45-minute lessons of English every week which were taught by the same teacher with many years of experience of teaching.

Target items

Ten verb-noun collocations were used as target collocations. These were collocations formed with delexical verbs (see appendix 1) that occur frequently in English. These verbs often

combine with nouns in such a way that their prototypical meaning is lost. In phrases such as 'make a proposal' or 'take a walk', the verbs become delexical or 'light' and the meaning of the whole collocation is carried by the nouns. According to Allan (1998), such verbs undergo desemantization and as a result are similar to semantically empty auxiliaries. Importantly for the purposes of the current study, Allerton (1984) highlights that the word selection in such collocations is partly arbitrary, which results in semantically unmotivated lexical restrictions on how these verbs can collocate with other words. As mentioned above, second language learners are often unaware of such restrictions regulating collocability of words in English and this leads to many collocational errors. For example, Altenberg and Granger (2001) present instances of miscollocations drawn from corpora of student writing produced by L1 Swedish and French learners ('make research' instead of 'do research', or 'make a step' instead of 'take a step'). The authors point out that research on learners from different L1 backgrounds shows that delexical verbs and their collocations are problematic, which makes them an important target for instruction in the EFL context as a whole.

In addition, since the issues of incongruency and learners' tendency to make collocational errors constituted the main rationale for this research, all the target items were incongruent collocations, i.e. they could not be easily translated from Polish into English. In collocations such as 'make a mistake' or 'make money', the verb 'make' is translated into Polish literally via the verb 'robić', a counterpart of 'make'. This means that such collocations are congruent in both English and Polish and therefore they were not used in the experiment. Additionally, as far as incongruent collocations are concerned, the process of decoding their meaning does not seem to be a problem. What causes much more difficulty is their form because it differs in learners' L1 and L2. As already indicated, the form is arbitrary, and learners, while faced with the task of forming a collocation, often think that any pair of words can be freely combined. All participants in this study were native speakers of Polish, so all the chosen incongruent collocations were assumed to cause difficulties (especially in language production) resulting from the L1 influence.

Finally, all the target collocations were controlled in terms of their frequency; that is they had at least 400 occurrences in the British National Corpus (Davies, 2004) consisting of 100 million words. With regard to the frequency of the nouns that were used in the target collocations, they were all frequent words in English (at least twenty-eight occurrences per million in the British National Corpus) and thus they were assumed to be known by participants.

Treatment

The experiment took the form of the Pre-test/Treatment/Post-test design. The treatment phase lasted three weeks preceded by a pre-test (administered one week before the treatment started) and followed by a delayed post-test (administered two weeks after the treatment ended). This meant that overall the whole experiment lasted six weeks.

As far as the treatment is concerned, it was provided once a week during a 45-minute lesson for three consecutive weeks. Both groups received exposure to the ten target collocations through reading texts in which these collocations had been embedded. Each target collocation appeared twice in each text. Since the experiment lasted three weeks, participants were exposed to the ten target collocations at least six times. Yet it is likely that the number of exposures to the target collocations was higher, since delexical verbs are frequently used in English and they might have appeared in the language input learners were provided with during classes which were not included in the study.

As presented in Table 1 below, each week participants read a different story followed by 12 comprehension questions and this reading phase of the lesson lasted around 10-12 minutes. The texts were about 730 words long and were specifically designed for this study. After answering the comprehension questions, both groups completed a vocabulary task. Participants in the meaning-focused plus form-focused instruction group (MFI plus) were asked to complete vocabulary activities that were directly focused on the target collocations: in week 1, a cloze activity in which learners had to fill in the gaps with collocations; in week 2, a matching activity containing target collocations and their definitions (there were 20 collocations, including the target items, and the learners had to choose their corresponding definitions from 25 options provided); and in week 3, completing a table where eight delexical verbs were given and learners had to decide which of the provided words (36 nouns) formed collocations with them. Each week learners had around 10 minutes to complete this additional vocabulary activity. In contrast, participants in the meaning-focused instruction only group (MFI only), having answered the comprehension questions, were given another comprehension-based activity in which they had to complete sentences on the basis of the information found in the texts.

Thus, the difference in the treatment between the two groups was the type of vocabulary instruction that participants were provided with. Throughout the whole experiment, in the MFI plus group the reading phase was followed by form-focused instruction (FonFs), whereas in the MFI only group participants continued with the meaning-focused instruction after they finished reading. In terms of time, both groups were given the same amount of time to complete the exercises. Therefore, it can be claimed that time-on-task was controlled for by the design. No L1 translation was provided throughout the whole experiment. Finally, it also needs to be stated that during the study participants concentrated on other aspects of English as well, since they had three lessons of English a week and the experiment was conducted only during one of them. This ensured the ecological validity of the study.

Figure 1: Design of the study

	Group 1	Group 2	Control Group
Type of treatment	Meaning-focused instruction plus focus-on-Forms	Meaning-focused instruction	Only pretest and posttest
1 st part of the lesson:	Reading comprehension: true or false statements Time: 10-12 minutes	Reading comprehension: true or false statements Time: 10-12 minutes	
2 nd part of the lesson:	Focus-on-Forms: a cloze (week 1); definitions (week 2); a table (week 3) Time: 10 minutes	Complete the sentences (learners' attention is focused on meaning/reading comprehension); Time: 10 minutes	

Testing measures

According to Schmitt (2010), vocabulary knowledge is a complex concept and it needs to be measured at different levels of mastery. Consequently, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the acquisition of collocations in both experimental conditions, a testing battery consisting of

three tests tapping into both productive and receptive aspects of collocational competence was used (see appendix 3).

1st test (form recall of a collocation)

The first test was a productive test of collocations in which learners were given Polish phrases and were asked to provide their English equivalents. To score a point, the learners had to provide a verb and a noun.

Translate into English

zrobić zdjęcie _____

(‘take a photograph’)*

* The English translation is given here for clarity purposes – participants were given only Polish phrases

2nd test (form recall of a verb)

The second test was a productive test of collocations where learners had to provide a verb that forms a collocation with a given verb. A definition of the whole collocation in English was supplied as a prompt. In order to score a point, learners were told not to provide the verbs that were used in the given definitions.

Complete the expressions with verbs

_____ a photo (to create an image of a person or thing with the use of a camera)

(‘take’ is the correct answer)

3rd test (form recognition of a verb)

The third test was a receptive test of collocations where learners had to choose the correct answer out of the four options that were provided. Since multiple-choice tests are prone to guessing, learners were told to circle the ‘I don’t know’ option if they did not know what the correct answer was. Even though providing this option does not exclude completely the possibility of guessing, this practice has been used in previous research on vocabulary acquisition (e.g. Brown, Waring & Donkaewbua, 2008).

Choose the correct option

_____ a photo (create an image of a person or thing with the use of a camera)
a) make b) take c) have d) do e) I don't know

Testing students' ability to recognize the whole collocations was excluded, since meaning recognition seems to be implied by learners' recall abilities (Laufer and Girsai, 2008). If learners are able to recall the meaning of a collocation, one can assume they will also be able to recognize it when they encounter it in real contexts.

Since the pre-test and the post-test had the same format, there was a possibility that some learning might have occurred from the exposure to the tests. However, in order to reduce the washback effect, the order of items on all the tests was changed. What is more, the inclusion of the control group should help determine if taking the tests led to any improvements in learners' collocational knowledge.

Results

Before the treatment started, all participants completed a pre-test which consisted of the three tests described above. The same tests (with items put in a different order) were used in the post-test administered two weeks after the treatment ended. Due to the fact that the data was not normally distributed, nonparametric tests were used in the statistical analysis (SPSS).

As far as the results of the pre-test are concerned, Kruskal-Wallis Test results showed no significant differences between the three groups on all three tests: Test One ($X^2(2, 43)=2.87$, $p>.05$; $r=.02$), Test Two ($X^2(2, 43)=4.03$, $p>.05$; $r=.04$) and Test Three ($X^2(2, 43)=3.38$, $p>.05$; $r=.06$). This means that all participants had the same levels of collocational knowledge before the treatment started. Such conditions were necessary to ensure that any changes in the collocational knowledge found on the post-test could be attributed to the treatment provided.

In order to answer the first research question and check how learners' knowledge changed between the pre-test and the post-test, a series of Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests was conducted. These tests were conducted separately for each group.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test results in the MFIplus group;
max score = 10

Condition	Session				<i>Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test</i>	<i>P value</i>	<i>Effect size</i>
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Md</i>			
Meaning plus (N= 13)	Pre-test Test1	1.5	1.2	1.0	-2.94	.003*	r = .58
	Post-test Test 1	4.8	1.7	5.0			
	Pre-test Test2	2.8	1.2	3.0	-3.20	.001*	r = .63
	Post-test Test2	6.5	1.6	6.0			
	Pre-test Test 3	4.3	1.5	4.0	-3.07	.002*	r = .60
	Post-test Test 3	6.8	1.1	7.0			

Table 3. Pre-test and post-test results in the MFI only group;
max score = 10

Condition	Session				<i>Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test</i>	<i>P value</i>	<i>Effect size</i>
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Md</i>			
Meaning only (N= 13)	Pre-test Test1	1.1	0.9	1.0	-1.51	p>.05	r = .30
	Post-test Test 1	1.8	1.5	1.0			
	Pre-test Test2	2.4	1.7	3.0	-2.17	.03*	r = .42
	Post-test Test2	3.8	2.0	4.0			
	Pre-test Test 3	3.5	1.6	4.0	-1.97	.048*	r = .39
	Post-test Test 3	4.8	2.3	4.0			

Table 4. Pre-test and post-test results in the control group;
max score = 10

Condition	Session	Mean	SD	Md	Wilcoxon	P	Effect
					Signed Rank Test		
Control (N= 17)	Pre-test	1.1	1.9	1.0	-1.99	.046*	r = .34
	Test1						
	Post-test Test 1	1.8	1.8	1.0			
	Pre-test	1.9	2.1	1.0	-2.50	.012*	r = .43
	Test2						
	Post-test Test2	3.1	2.1	3.0			
	Pre-test	3.2	2.1	3.0	-1.34	p>.05	r = .23
	Test 3						
	Post-test Test 3	3.8	2.1	3.0			

As shown in Table 2, there was a significant difference between learners' collocational knowledge measured on the pre-test and the post-test in the MFI plus group on all the tests. In the MFI only group (Table 3), learners' knowledge improved significantly on Test Two and Test Three. On Test One, even though learners knew more on the post-test than on the pre-test, we can only talk about a trend indicating improvement in collocational competence since this difference did not reach significance. The control group (Table 4), who only completed the testing measures, learners' collocational knowledge was significantly higher on Test One and Test Two. This might suggest that some learning occurred through the exposure to the target items on the administered tests, which necessitates the comparison of the post-test results from all three groups. This comparison will also provide answers to the second research question which concerned the effectiveness of the two types of treatment under study. Similarly to the results of the pre-test, several Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted (Table 5).

Table 5. Post-test mean scores in collocational knowledge (productive and receptive) under all conditions (max score = 10)

	Meaning Plus			Meaning Only			Control			Kruskal-Wallis Test	P value
	Mean	SD	Med	Mean	SD	Med	Mean	SD	Med		
Test One	4.8	1.7	5.0	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.8	1.8	1.0	$X^2=17.08$.001*
Test Two	6.5	1.6	6.0	3.8	2.0	4.0	3.1	2.1	3.0	$X^2=16.65$.001*
Test Three	6.8	1.1	7.0	4.8	2.3	4.0	3.8	2.1	3.0	$X^2=12.76$.002*

On all three tests, Kruskal-Wallis tests showed that there was a significant difference between the three groups (Test One: $X^2(2, 43)=17.08, p<.005$; Test Two: $X^2(2, 43)=16.65, p<.05$; Test Three: $X^2(2, 43)=12.76, p<.05$). In order to determine which groups differed from one another, post-hoc Mann-Whitney U Tests were conducted. The results revealed that the MFI plus group knew significantly more than the MFI only group (Test One: $U=17, z=-3.53, p<.001, r=.69$; Test Two: $U=31, z=-2.80, p<.05, r=.55$; Test Three: $U=38.5, z=-2.39, p<.05, r=.47$) and the control group (Test One: $U=25.5, z=-3.61, p<.001, r=.66$; Test Two: $U=170.5, z=-3.94, p<.001, r=.72$; Test Three: $U=31, z=-3.37, p<.001, r=.61$). Importantly, there were no significant differences between the MFI only group and the control group on any of the tests (Test One: $U=105, z=-.24, p>.05, r=.04$; Test Two: $U=82, z=-1.21, p>.05, r=.22$; Test Three: $U=77.5, z=-1.41, p>.05, r=.26$).

Finally, in order to determine differences in the results of the three tests, several Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests were conducted separately for the pre-test and the post-test data. As far as the pre-test data are concerned, results from all three tests differed from one another: Test One vs. Test Two ($z=-4.064, p<.001, r=.44$); Test Two vs. Test Three ($z=-4.773, p<.001, r=.51$); and Test One vs. Test Three ($z=-5.203, p<.001, r=.56$). Similar patterns were observed in the post-

test data where results from all three tests differed from one another: Test One vs. Test Two ($z = -4.938$, $p < .001$, $r = .53$); Test Two vs. Test Three ($z = -2.821$, $p < .01$, $r = .30$); and Test One vs. Test Three ($z = -5.452$, $p < .001$, $r = .59$). These findings suggest that the measurement tools used in this study were effective at tapping into learners' collocational knowledge at various levels of mastery.

Discussion

The first research question aimed to investigate the acquisition of collocations in two different types of instruction: MFI plus FonFs and MFI only. Findings revealed that learners' collocational knowledge improved as a result of the treatments provided in both groups. As the comparison between the results of the pre-test and the post-test showed, learners in the MFI plus group significantly improved their collocational knowledge on Test One, Test Two and Test Three. Learners in the MFI only group, on the other hand, significantly improved their collocational knowledge on Test Two and Test Three. This would suggest that the treatment provided in the form of MFI only is not enough to improve learners' knowledge of collocations on the most difficult productive level. Interestingly, the results of the control group indicated that the learners' collocational knowledge improved significantly between the pre-test and the post-test on Test One and Test Two. Since this group did not receive any treatment, the acquired knowledge can be attributed to general learning. Delexical verbs are frequent in English and it is likely that learners were exposed to collocations in the teacher's talk or in the coursebook that was used. Even though the teacher was informed not to use the target collocations while talking to students throughout the whole experiment, the potential exposure to the target items is a possibility that needs to be acknowledged. Consequently, this caveat ought to be taken into account in the discussion of the obtained results. Another reason for the results of the control group might be the washback effect of the administered tests which cannot be forgotten while interpreting the results.

As mentioned before, vocabulary knowledge is a complex construct that needs to be measured at different levels of mastery. Results of this experiment confirm that this applies to collocational knowledge as well. The statistical analysis showed that there were significant differences between the results obtained on the three tests: Test One (providing English collocations on the basis of the Polish translation), Test Two (providing a node on the basis of a definition) or Test Three (choosing the correct verb out of four options provided). This means that there are

several aspects of collocational competence and they need to be carefully operationalized if one wants to capture the complexity of second language learners' vocabulary. This experiment shows that collocations, similarly to individual words, are more difficult to acquire at the productive than at the receptive level. In all three groups of learners, the scores on Test One were lower than the scores on Test Two. These results are similar to the ones obtained by Laufer and Girsai (2008), who also demonstrated the difficulty of improving collocational knowledge at the productive level. Yet, even on Test One, which was the most difficult one, learners in the MFI plus group managed to increase their collocational knowledge as their overall scores on the post-test were significantly higher than on the pre-test. This proves the effectiveness of FonFs in terms of enhancing collocational knowledge. Similarly, on Test Two, the MFI plus group knew significantly more on the post-test than on the pre-test. Interestingly, the results of the MFI only group on these tests were also significantly higher than on the pre-test. However, since there were no significant differences between the results of the MFI only group and the control group, it is likely that the learning that occurred in the MFI only group was due to general learning and the exposure to the target items during the testing sessions. Nevertheless, the role of incidental learning in general should not be neglected, for not all vocabulary can be targeted explicitly in FFI. As Nation (2007) points out in his description of a four-strand vocabulary learning programme, incidental learning can lead to substantial gains in knowledge, provided that learners are exposed to large quantities of language input (e.g. through an extensive reading programme). More research is needed to establish the most optimal conditions in which form- and meaning-focused instruction will supplement each other in the process of teaching collocations.

With regard to the second research question which concerned the comparison of the effectiveness of the two types of instruction, findings showed that the collocational knowledge of learners from the MFI plus group was significantly higher than of those in the MFI only group, on both the productive tests (Test One and Test Two) and the receptive test (Test Three). These results indicate that MFI plus FonFs is an effective type of instruction leading to high scores in collocational knowledge. In contrast, collocational knowledge of learners in the MFI only group did not differ significantly from those in the control group. Such results confirm previous findings (e.g. Laufer & Girsai, 2008), suggesting that the acquisition of collocations in meaning-focused conditions is slow. In the study described here, participants saw each target collocation at least six times throughout the experiment. This does not seem to have led to improvement in the MFI

only group. It appears that reading texts in which target collocations are embedded without any enhancement (incidental conditions) does not seem to be sufficient to improve learners' knowledge of collocations with delexical verbs. Perhaps the number of occurrences of the target collocations needs to be higher to find positive effects of incidental learning of collocations.

Moreover, since it is known that frequency plays an important role in vocabulary learning (Schmitt 2010), the frequency of collocations as whole combinations may be another factor worth considering. All the collocations used in this study occurred frequently in the BNC. It is likely that the results would have been different with lower-frequency collocations. In addition, the study reported here was focused on collocations of delexical verbs with nouns that were likely to be known by the participants. Different results could have been obtained for collocations formed out of different word classes that learners were not familiar with (e.g. adjective-adverb collocations). Finally, as far as MFI plus FonFs is concerned, the study confirms results found in previous research on individual words. For example, Hill and Laufer (2003) found that tasks focused on target vocabulary that followed reading resulted in more vocabulary learning than answering questions which required comprehension of that vocabulary. Also Mondria (2003) showed that post-reading activities targeting vocabulary had a positive impact on learners' lexical competence. The present experiment indicates that MFI plus FonFs helps acquire not only individual words but also collocations.

Conclusion

The study's aim was to compare how collocations of delexical verbs are acquired by EFL learners in two different conditions: meaning-focused instruction plus focus-on-forms (MFI plus) and meaning-focused instruction (MFI only). Results showed that in the MFI plus group learners significantly improved their collocational knowledge on all three administered tests (productive and receptive levels). The instruction provided in the MFI only group did not seem to lead to gains in learners' collocational knowledge. More research is needed to establish whether meaning-focused instruction, in which learners are presented with more exposure to formulaic sequences, would lead to different findings. In the present study, the target collocations were embedded in reading texts in such a way that each participant saw them six times. Perhaps many more occurrences are needed to show improvement in collocational knowledge. As far as the effectiveness of the provided treatments is concerned, the MFI plus FonFs condition led to better results than the MFI only condition at both productive and receptive levels of collocational

competence. This means that providing form-focused instruction in incongruent collocations has a positive impact on learners' lexical competence and therefore, it is recommended for classroom practice. Incongruent collocations such as the ones used in this study cannot be directly translated from learners' mother tongue and are often misused by them in both speech and writing. A useful follow-up to this study would be to assess how the two kinds of treatment influence the acquisition of other kinds of collocations (e.g. adverb-adjective collocations or adjective-noun collocations), as well as how learners at different proficiency levels in English respond to such instruction.

Biodata

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Appendix 1

Target items

1. give birth
2. take office
3. take a step
4. have a discussion
5. make a payment
6. do damage
7. take a risk
8. do a favour
9. give pleasure
10. make a profit

Appendix 2

A text and comprehension questions given to students during week one of the treatment

Text 1

Read the following text and say if the statements below are true or false.

Andrew was an old man who had only one child, a daughter. When he heard that his daughter was pregnant and due to give birth to a girl, he was delighted. Andrew was even more delighted when, a few years later, his granddaughter Jenny came to live with him on his farm.

Jenny's mother was very hard-working. She was the youngest woman ever to take office as a judge in the UK, and was often away from home. So she asked Andrew to do a favour for her and let Jenny stay with him. Andrew loved Jenny so happily agreed, knowing the arrangement would give pleasure to his granddaughter too. Jenny came to live on his farm when she was six, and while there she began to learn about horses.

Jenny admired her grandfather's horse riding skills. When he was young, Andrew had wanted to be a professional rider, but had never dared to take a step towards competing. He thought maybe his granddaughter would learn to ride, and perhaps she would take a risk and try competing. Jenny quickly learned how to feed a horse and how to take care of it. She even watched one of the horses give birth to a baby horse. She and her grandfather would often sit down to have a discussion about the horses, and she learned to understand them by watching their behaviour.

On her twelfth birthday, Jenny asked her father if she could take riding lessons. Like his wife, Jenny's father was very busy, as he was a politician. It was election time and he was hoping to take office in government. Although Jenny's parents were rich, Jenny wanted to make a payment each month towards the lessons out of her pocket money to show everybody how serious she was about learning to ride well. When Jenny started her lessons, she learned quickly and everybody was proud of her.

When Jenny turned fifteen, she wanted to go to a special riding secondary school. This was very expensive, even for Jenny's father. For Jenny to start at the school, he had to make a

payment to cover the first three months of Jenny's stay at the school. Later he managed to make a profit on some land he was selling, and used the money to pay the rest. He agreed that Jenny could go to the school on the condition that riding would not do damage to her school duties. He feared that Jenny wouldn't do her homework because of her riding, but she promised to study hard.

At the school, Jenny had normal lessons each day, followed by riding classes. Her riding teacher knew that Jenny liked to take a risk and ride fast and he always told her that one day she would be a champion. In his opinion, Jenny was one of the best students he had ever had. When Jenny was eighteen, Jenny's teacher asked her to do a favour for him and teach his children how to ride. It was difficult because the children were young and she had to make sure that the horses didn't do damage to them. But Jenny loved her new job and it allowed her to make some money. Also, she was very good at teaching, so her young students were soon riding confidently.

Since Jenny worked hard on her riding skills, she soon became the best rider in her age group. Her teacher said she was ready to take a step further and start taking part in competitions. When she entered her first competition, Jenny's father came to watch her ride. He was extremely proud when he saw Jenny's performance, and she too felt proud that her skill at riding could give pleasure to her father. When his daughter won, he knew it was time to buy a horse for her. He went, with Andrew, to Manchester to have a discussion with some horse dealers. The dealers mainly wanted to make a profit and tried to sell them a very expensive horse. But Andrew knew this business well and after long talks he told Jenny's father to buy a beautiful three-year old Arab.

Two months later, Jenny's grandfather and her parents attended her school graduation ceremony. Afterwards, when Andrew presented Jenny with a young tall horse, she did not know what to say and she started to cry. She only whispered: 'This is the happiest day of my life'.

True (T) or False (F)

1. There were many children in Andrew's family.
2. On her grandfather's farm, Jenny learned how to climb trees.
3. Andrew wanted Jenny to learn how to enjoy horse riding.



4. Jenny's father decided that she should go to a riding school.
5. Jenny was afraid of horses at her school.
6. Jenny knew she had to study hard at school.
7. Jenny's teacher knew that Jenny would be a great rider.
8. Jenny's new job was easy.
9. Jenny liked teaching children.
10. Jenny's father didn't approve of her decision to start competing.
11. Jenny asked her parents to buy her a horse.
12. Andrew paid for Jenny's horse.

Appendix 3

Test 1

Translate the following phrases from Polish into English. You must provide **both a verb and a noun.**

1. Robić kurs
2. Mieć przerwę
3. Wysłać list
4. Iść na ryby
5. Przyjąć założenie
6. Zjeść posiłek
7. Zrobić zdjęcie
8. Dokonać wpłaty
9. Iść na zakupy
10. Objąć kierownictwo
11. Poradzić komuś, udzielić rady
12. Uśmiechnąć się
13. Obrazić się, poczuć się urażonym
14. Wykonać zadanie
15. Napić się
16. Dać odpowiedź
17. Brać udział
18. Dać przykład
19. Podjąć decyzję
20. Robić zadanie domowe
21. Wyrządzić szkodę
22. Brać odpowiedzialność
23. Pokłócić się
24. Osiągnąć cel
25. Wykonać ruch
26. Przeprowadzić eksperyment
27. Robić postęp

28. Przejąć kontrolę
29. Zwracać komuś uwagę
30. Udzielić wywiadu
31. Dobrze się bawić
32. Poczynić spostrzeżenie
33. Robić notatki
34. Odbyć rozmowę
35. Osiągnąć zysk
36. Brać leki
37. Wykonać krok
38. Zrobić błąd
39. Urodzić
40. Robić interesy
41. Przynieść ulgę
42. Złożyć wizytę
43. Mieć trudności
44. Prowadzić badania naukowe
45. Odbyć dyskusję
46. Mieć, wywierać wpływ
47. Odbywać się, mieć miejsce
48. Robić wrażenie
49. Zdrzemnąć się
50. Złamać obietnicę

Test 2

Complete the phrases with **one verb** so that they express the meaning provided in the brackets.
Don't use the verbs from the brackets. If you think more than one answer is possible, give all alternatives.

1. _____ homework (to complete, usually at home, exercises resulting from one's school duties)
2. _____ a decision (to choose a given course of action from among all the possible ones as a result of careful thinking)



3. _____ a letter (to post a written piece of communication to somebody)
4. _____ a conversation (to talk to somebody, usually informally, in order to exchange information, ideas and/or opinions)
5. _____ shopping (to visit shops with the intention of buying products)
6. _____ a conference (to organize a formal two- or three-day meeting of scientists during which they discuss the results of their work)
7. _____ a profit (to earn money from your business by for example selling something at a good price)
8. _____ pleasure (to cause positive feelings and provide satisfaction by doing something enjoyable or funny)
9. _____ an aim (to intend to reach an aim through effort and/or ambition)
10. _____ an experiment (to do a test under controlled conditions to answer to scientific questions)
11. _____ a payment (to perform the act of paying for products or services)
12. _____ a drink (to take a liquid into the mouth and swallow it when you feel like drinking)
13. _____ charge (to begin to control a situation or a group of people)
14. _____ a discussion (to hold, usually formally, an exchange of opinions with other people on a particular subject)
15. _____ birth (to produce a baby from the woman's body after nine months of pregnancy)
16. _____ damage (to cause harm to people or things)
17. _____ responsibility (to accept the consequences of one's actions and behaviour)
18. _____ part (to participate in a given activity or event)
19. _____ an example (to provide a piece of information that is a typical representative of a group or class)
20. _____ a favour (to perform an activity for other people in order to help them)
21. _____ a course (to take and complete a number of formal lessons in order to gain knowledge and skills)
22. _____ a photograph (to produce an image of a person or thing with the use of a camera)
23. _____ an answer (to provide a spoken or written reply to somebody's questions)
24. _____ an argument (to participate in a loud exchange of opinions, sometimes violent, during which strong disagreement is expressed)
25. _____ progress (to experience gradual and satisfactory development or growth)

26. _____ control (to begin to have power or responsibility over something)
27. _____ influence (to be able to produce an effect on a person or a course of events as a result of one's power or position)
28. _____ a warning (to tell somebody in advance of a possible danger or risk)
29. _____ a task (to carry out a piece of work resulting from one's responsibilities and/or duties)
30. _____ fun (to participate in activities that result in enjoyment and/or amusement)
31. _____ notes (to keep a short record of information in writing for future use)
32. _____ medicines (to use a given substance that prevents the signs of an illness)
33. _____ a remark (to comment on something and express your opinion about it)
34. _____ a mistake (to perform a wrong action as a result of bad judgment or lack of knowledge)
35. _____ a meal (to eat the food served usually at a regular time)
36. _____ business (to manufacture and sell products in order to earn money)
37. _____ offence (to feel angry or insulted by other people's words or actions)
38. _____ a visit (to perform the act of staying with somebody as a guest)
39. _____ difficulties (to experience something that causes trouble)
40. _____ a step (to complete the movement of putting one foot in a different place)
41. _____ progress (to improve and advance to a better stage)
42. _____ a risk (to perform actions despite the possibility of suffering loss or harm)
43. _____ place (to be held or happen in a particular place at a particular time)
44. _____ an impression (to produce an effect or a picture of oneself as a result of one's behaviour or actions)
45. _____ a break (to stop doing a given action one performs in order to rest)
46. _____ a promise (to fail to complete an action one has declared to do)
47. _____ a move (to change the position of one's body from one point to another)
48. _____ advice (to provide suggestions as to what should be done in a given situation)
49. _____ office (to work in a public position of authority, for example in a government)
50. _____ research (to run experiments to find answers to scientific questions)

Test 3

Choose the verb that best completes the following phrases in such a way that the meaning provided in the brackets is expressed. If you don't know the answer, **don't guess** and choose response e) I don't know.

- 1) _____ fishing (to travel to a river or a lake with the intention of catching fish)
 - a) give
 - b) make
 - c) do
 - d) go
 - e) I don't know
- 2) _____ a break (to stop doing a given action one performs in order to rest)
 - a) have
 - b) make
 - c) do
 - d) give
 - e) I don't know
- 3) _____ a photograph (to create an image of a person or thing with the use of a camera)
 - a) give
 - b) make
 - c) do
 - d) take
 - e) I don't know
- 4) _____ a promise (to fail to complete an action one has declared to do)
 - a) have
 - b) do
 - c) break
 - d) take
 - e) I don't know
- 5) _____ offence (to feel angry or insulted by other people's words or actions)
 - a) have
 - b) make
 - c) take
 - d) do
 - e) I don't know
- 6) _____ an interview (to agree, as an interviewee, to be asked questions about work, personal life and opinions on different subjects)
 - a) take
 - b) give
 - c) do
 - d) make
 - e) I don't know
- 7) _____ a task (to carry out a piece of work required as part of one's duties)
 - a) take
 - b) make
 - c) give
 - d) do
 - e) I don't know
- 8) _____ an assumption (to perform the act of accepting a particular fact as true without having proof)
 - a) have
 - b) make
 - c) do
 - d) give
 - e) I don't know
- 9) _____ a drink (to take a liquid into the mouth and swallow it when you are thirsty)
 - a) do
 - b) make
 - c) give
 - d) have
 - e) I don't know
- 10) _____ a step (to complete the movement of putting one foot in a different place)
 - a) give
 - b) do
 - c) make
 - d) take
 - e) I don't know
- 11) _____ a smile (to change one's facial expression to show other people one's contentment or friendliness)
 - a) make
 - b) take
 - c) give
 - d) do
 - e) I don't know
- 12) _____ research (to conduct scientific investigation to establish facts or principles)
 - a) do
 - b) make
 - c) give
 - d) take
 - e) I don't know

- 13) _____ an observation (to provide a comment or remark expressing a personal opinion)
a) do b) make c) take d) give e) I don't know
- 14) _____ shopping (to visit shops with the intention of buying products)
a) give b) make c) do d) take e) I don't know
- 15) _____ a meal (to eat the food served usually at a regular time)
a) have b) do c) make d) give e) I don't know
- 16) _____ advice (to provide suggestions as to what should be done in a given situation)
a) do b) make c) give d) have e) I don't know
- 17) _____ responsibility (to be legally and/or morally accountable for completing actions assigned by somebody or created by one's own promise)
a) give b) make c) take d) do e) I don't know
- 18) _____ part (to participate in a given activity or event)
a) make b) give c) take d) have e) I don't know
- 19) _____ an example (to provide an item of information that is a typical representative of a group or class)
a) have b) make c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 20) _____ a decision (to select a given choice from among the available options as a result of a careful cognitive process)
a) have b) make c) give d) do e) I don't know
- 21) _____ charge (to begin to control or command a situation or a group of people)
a) take b) have c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 22) _____ a course (to take and complete a series of formal lessons in order to gain knowledge and skills)
a) give b) make c) do d) have e) I don't know
- 23) _____ an answer (to provide a spoken or written reply)
a) make b) give c) take d) do e) I don't know
- 24) _____ an argument (to participate in a loud exchange of opinions, sometimes violent, during which strong disagreement is expressed)
a) have b) do c) give d) take e) I don't know
- 25) _____ an aim (to intend to reach a specific goal as a consequence of effort and/or persistence)
a) do b) make c) give d) have e) I don't know

- 26) _____ progress (to experience gradual and satisfactory development or growth)
a) take b) make c) do d) have e) I don't know
- 27) _____ a discussion (to hold, usually formally, an oral exchange of opinions with other people on a particular topic)
a) have b) do c) make d) give e) I don't know
- 28) _____ control (to assume power or authority over something)
a) give b) take c) do d) make e) I don't know
- 29) _____ a move (to change the position of one's body from one point to another)
a) have b) make c) give d) do e) I don't know
- 30) _____ a reprimand (to express criticism of somebody, usually in a formal or official way)
a) have b) make c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 31) _____ fun (to participate in activities that are a source of enjoyment and/or amusement)
a) have b) give c) make d) take e) I don't know
- 32) _____ notes (to create a brief record of information in writing for future reference)
a) make b) have c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 33) _____ a conversation (to hold, usually informally, an oral exchange of information, ideas, opinions with a person/people)
a) do b) give c) take d) have e) I don't know
- 34) _____ damage (to cause harm or injury to property or a person)
a) give b) do c) make d) have e) I don't know
- 35) _____ a profit (to obtain money from your business by for example selling something at a good price)
a) have b) make c) give d) do e) I don't know
- 36) _____ medicines (to use a given substance that prevents the symptoms of a disease)
a) give b) make c) do d) take e) I don't know
- 37) _____ a mistake (to perform a wrong action as a result of bad judgment or lack of knowledge)
a) do b) make c) have d) give e) I don't know
- 38) _____ business (to be involved in producing and trading goods in order to obtain money)
a) give b) make c) take d) do e) I don't know

- 39) _____ birth (to produce a baby from the womb as a result of labour)
a) have b) make c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 40) _____ a visit (to perform the act of staying with somebody as a guest)
a) do b) give c) make d) have e) I don't know
- 41) _____ difficulties (to experience factors causing trouble in achieving positive results)
a) give b) take c) have d) do e) I don't know
- 42) _____ relief (to provide something pleasant or establish different conditions to remove anxiety or stress)
a) have b) do c) give d) make e) I don't know
- 43) _____ an experiment (to conduct a test under controlled conditions to provide answers to scientific questions)
a) give b) make c) do d) take e) I don't know
- 44) _____ a payment (to perform the act of paying for specific goods or services)
a) have b) make c) do d) give e) I don't know
- 45) _____ place (to be held or occur in a particular location at a particular time)
a) do b) make c) give d) take e) I don't know
- 46) _____ an impression (to produce an effect or an image as a result of one's actions)
a) have b) take c) make d) do e) I don't know
- 47) _____ a nap (to sleep for a brief period, usually during a day)
a) make b) give c) do d) have e) I don't know
- 48) _____ a letter (to dispatch a written piece of communication)
a) do b) make c) send d) take e) I don't know
- 49) _____ homework (to complete, usually at home, tasks resulting from one's school duties)
a) take b) make c) give d) do e) I don't know
- 50) _____ influence (to be able to produce an effect on a person or a course of events as a result of one's power or position)
a) make b) have c) take d) do e) I don't know