



INCIDENTAL VOCABULARY LEARNING: CHALLENGING COLLOCATION FORMS TO ACQUIRE

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Abstract:

The ongoing research examined the complex nature of collocations in the context of incidental vocabulary acquisition of challenging collocation forms to internalize in English. A total of 157 participants engaged in a series of five timed vocabulary assessments, which were administered sequentially via Google Forms. The percentage of correct responses was gathered and analyzed according to each specific collocation type. Notably, the participants experienced the greatest difficulty with the "N + V" collocation form, while they achieved their highest accuracy in the "Adv + Adj" form. The research findings indicate that students faced significant challenges with "N + V" collocations, while they demonstrated a greater ease in understanding "Adv + Adj" collocations. Consequently, several recommendations can be proposed to address these disparities in comprehension.

Keywords: vocabulary, incidental vocabulary learning, collocations

1. Introduction

Vocabulary refers to a key component of language proficiency, and moment dialect (L2) learners have to be construct expansive lexicon to be able to communicate effectively. According to Webb (2020), in order for learners to reach the lexical objectives fundamental for fruitful comprehension of talked and composed input, they have to supplement think learning with incidental learning. Peters & Webb (2018) interpreted that incidental vocabulary learning can occur through reading, listening, simultaneously reading while listening, and viewing, with studies indicating that watching TV shows and films is the most prevalent source of L2 input beyond the classroom.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Different studies show that people learn new words by chance in different ways, but two main methods are often looked at when researchers study how people learn words in a second language. The second definition explains that sometimes we learn new words just by using language, almost like a bonus or extra surprise (Webb & Nation, 2017; Wode, 1999). Incidental vocabulary learning is of paramount importance in L2 learning. Compared to words that are purposefully learned in exercises, learners may learn more about words that they encountered in context, such as form–meaning connection, collocation, word parts, and constraints on use (Webb, 2007; Webb & Nation, 2017). As a result, learners may expand their vocabulary and gain a deeper comprehension of words when they see them frequently in context. Whether or if L2 words are accidentally learnt depends in great part on the quantity of L2 input that learners get exposed to (Webb & Nation, 2017). For instance, it is possible that EFL students do not get enough L2 oral or written exposure outside of the classroom for a large number of incidental vocabulary learning to take place (Webb & Nation, 2017). The primary source of oral input in an EFL context may frequently be listening to teachers (Krashen, 1982; Macaro & Tian, 2015; Meunier, 2012).

According to Meunier (2012), the high percentage of instructor talking time—more than two-thirds of class time on average—can be viewed as a typical form of input in many EFL teaching environments. The accidental vocabulary acquisition of single words and collocations through instructor listening is examined in this research. Examining whether teacher use of L1 translation and its frequency of occurrence were linked to higher vocabulary learning was the secondary goal of the current study. Research indicates that the elaboration of meaning in spoken and written language has a positive impact on word learning (e.g., Lee & Levine, 2020; Zhao & Macaro, 2016), and numerous studies demonstrate that repeated exposure to a word results in vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Vidal, 2011; Webb, Newton, & Chang, 2013). However, it appears that no research has examined whether each of these two criteria influences incidental vocabulary learning through teacher conversation at this time.

According to Hulstijn (2013), Krashen's (1989, p. 2632) input hypothesis gave rise to a wide range of research on incidental vocabulary learning, which is defined as "*the acquisition of a word or expression without the conscious intention to commit the element to memory, such as 'picking up' an unknown word from listening to someone or from reading a text.*" The way one pays attention to words when reading or listening is what distinguishes incidental vocabulary learning from intentional vocabulary learning. Research conducted by Zahar, Cobb, and Spada (2001) highlights various elements that influence the incidental acquisition of vocabulary, providing insight into the varying rates at which second language (L2) learners acquire new words. Among these elements are the lexical complexity of the texts encountered, the frequency of word repetition, the opportunities for generative use of words, and the degree of salience of the vocabulary presented.

2.2. Related Studies

Previous research indicates that second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition can be furthered by engaging with audio-visual content (Rodgers & Webb, 2019). Muñoz (2017) indicated that the bigger portion of considers in this zone have reviewed the amplexness of captions and/or to start with lingo (L1) subtitles for learning since they have been claimed to be the ones most as frequently as conceivable experienced by L2 learners. Bartolomé & Cabrera (2005) expressed that in any case, in certain multilingual settings where two or more tongues are talked, bilingual subtitles are utilized to serve broad masses. In showing disdain toward of the reality that region China can be a monolingual region with Mandarin as the official tongue, the utilize of bilingual subtitles has finished up dynamically predominant inside the past two decades (Liao, Kruger, & Doherty, 2020). In appear abhor toward of their ubiquity, especially small explore has been conducted to see their benefits for tongue learning. Nation (2001) stated that L2 learners are thought to progressively enhance their understanding of new vocabulary through incidental exposure to unfamiliar words within the input they encounter.

According to Hulstijn (2003), this type of incidental learning occurs as learners participate in a range of communicative activities, such as reading, listening, and viewing, during which they acquire vocabulary by concentrating on the meaning of words rather than their form. Hulstijn (2003) also showed that a vocabulary learning condition is deemed incidental when participants are not informed about a vocabulary posttest prior to the treatment and are only made aware that they will undertake a comprehension assessment. In Andi and Ana's (2022) research, they investigated the effectiveness of bilingual subtitles relative to captions, monolingual subtitles, and the lack of subtitles in promoting incidental vocabulary learning. The research further explored how learners engaged with unfamiliar vocabulary presented in the subtitles and analyzed the relationship between this engagement and their overall language learning achievements. A total of 112 learners of English, classified as intermediate to advanced level in their proficiency, took part in the study, during which they viewed a documentary under one of four distinct conditions: bilingual subtitles, captions, first language (L1) subtitles, or the absence of subtitles altogether. Their eye movements were tracked continuously throughout the viewing process. Vocabulary assessments, comprising both pretests and posttests, were administered to gauge the participants' understanding of specific target words, focusing on their ability to recognize forms, recall meanings, and recognize meanings. The results indicated that bilingual subtitles were notably more effective than captions in facilitating meaning recognition and demonstrated superior efficacy compared to L1 subtitles in terms of meaning recall. The findings indicate that bilingual subtitles were not as effective as captions regarding the recognition of forms. Specifically, participants who engaged with bilingual subtitles spent a greater amount of time reading the Chinese translations of the target vocabulary in comparison to the English words. Furthermore, the level of attention given to the English terms, as opposed to the translations, showed a positive correlation with improved learning results.

Jin and Webb (2020) reported research findings on the incidental acquisition of single-word items and collocations through listening to a teacher talk. There is a noteworthy dearth of intervention research that expressly evaluate how listening to teachers in a classroom setting may aid vocabulary development, despite the fact that many studies have addressed incidental vocabulary learning by listening. Furthermore, it investigates the connection between vocabulary learning outcomes and two particular elements: the use of first language (L1) translation and the frequency of occurrence. In order to evaluate the improvements in learning, both a meaning-recall test and a multiple-choice assessment were utilized. The results indicated that engaging with teacher discourse plays a crucial role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition for both individual words and collocations, utilizing L1 translation to elucidate the meanings of target vocabulary led to more substantial gains on the immediate posttest, and the frequency of word occurrence was not identified as a significant factor influencing incidental vocabulary learning. Numerous scholars have explored the question of whether specific reading contexts facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition more effectively than others. Schmitt (2000) posits that enhancing the visibility of words within reading materials, particularly through techniques such as glossing and narrow extensive reading, may significantly boost the rate at which incidental vocabulary is learned.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Participants

The study involved 157 participants from different disciplines, such as General Medicine, Pharmacology, and Business Administration. They were aged 18-20, some of whom were double-majored. Approximately one-fourth got an IELTS score of 6.0.

3.2. Material

By using Google Forms, the researcher delivered 5 tests, whose times were allotted, to the participants.

Table 1: Selected collocations

No.	Forms	Collocations
1.	Adj + N	a lifelong friend
2.	Adv + Adj	stunningly attractive
3.	Idiom	foam at the mouth
4.	N + N	sense of achievement
5.	N + V	opportunity arises
6.	V + Adv	fail miserably
7.	V + N	make a change

3.3. Methods

Seven collocations, consisting of Adj + N (*a lifelong friend*), Adv + Adj (*stunningly attractive*), idioms (*foam at the mouth*), N + N (*sense of achievement*), N + V (*opportunity arises*), V + Adv (*fail miserably*), and V + N (*make a change*) were selected for the ongoing research.

They were all designed in five different tests, each of which lasted approximately 3 – 5 minutes.

Table 2: Extracts of the five tests

No.	Time (minutes)	Requirements	Example
Test 1	3	Match the given words or phrases with word below to make a combination of words in English, respectively.	Opportunity a. appears b. emerges c. arises d. rises
Test 2	5	How much do you remember?	Opportunity Write a short answer: _____
Test 3	3	How much do you remember? Match the given word or phrase with word below to make a combination of words in English	Opportunity a. arises b. appears c. rises d. emerges
Test 4	5	Translate these Vietnamese words and phrases into English.	Một cơ hội xuất hiện Write a short answer: _____
Test 5	5	Translate these English words and phrases into Vietnamese.	Opportunity arises: Write a short answer: _____

4. Results and Discussion

The present study attempted to address the research question: What kind of collocation forms that EFL learners find it hardest to acquire?

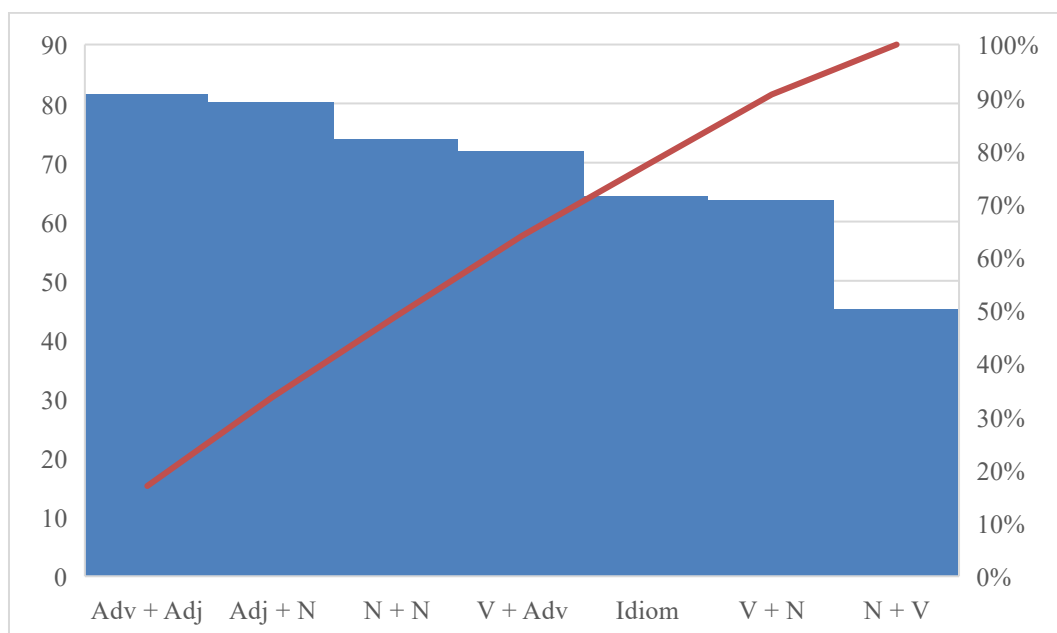


Figure 1: Overall results: Correct answers in percentage

The overall result showed that the students gained the lowest rate of correct answers in “*N + V*” form, indicating that they were the most confused about this form of collocation in English. Meanwhile, “*Adv + Adj*” form was the easiest for EFL learners to absorb. This result supported Jin and Webb (2020) research finding on the incidental acquisition of single-word items and collocations through listening to teacher discourse.

5. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, where students struggled most with “*N + V*” collocations and found “*Adv + Adj*” collocations easiest to grasp, the following recommendations can be made.

5.1. Recommendations to “*N + V*”

There are several recommendations to “*N + V*” collocation forms which learners have to struggle to acquire. Firstly, there should be targeted instruction on “*N + V*” collocations. Teachers should focus on explicit teaching. The difficulty with “*N + V*” combinations suggests that students may not have got exposed to or familiar with common “*N + V*” collocations in English. Teachers could incorporate explicit instruction of these collocations through context-rich examples, focusing on their frequent usage and meaning. This could be done via exercises, such as fill-in-the-blanks or sentence-creation tasks. Secondly, if possible, teachers should use real-world instances by incorporating authentic texts, namely newspapers, books, and movies, where “*N + V*” collocations appear naturally. Language learners should be encouraged to notice these forms in context, which can help to internalize patterns. Thirdly, students should be given a golden opportunity to practice through communicative activities, such as role-playing or creating dialogues that could help students use the collocations in context.

5.2. Recommendations to “*Adv + Adj*”

There are also several recommendations to reinforce “*Adv + Adj*” collocation form. Firstly, since students find “*Adv + Adj*” combinations easier, it may be useful to reinforce and expand this knowledge by introducing to learners more advanced or varied “*Adv + Adj*” collocations that are contextually appropriate for the learners' level. Secondly, teachers should challenge students to use them creatively. Students should be encouraged to use these collocations in writing and speaking tasks, through which it will reinforce their understanding of the combination and help them build fluency.

By focusing on these areas, EFL learners can strengthen their understanding of “*N + V*” collocations, while continuing to expand their knowledge and mastery of “*Adv + Adj*” collocations.

6. Conclusion

The ongoing study investigated the challenging forms of collocations through incidental vocabulary learning. By using Google Forms, the participants completed five allotted-

time vocabulary tests step by step. The corrected answers in percentage were collected and compared based on each collocation form, respectively. While the selected samples got the most perplexed by “N + V” form, they gained the highest percentage on “Adv + Adj” form.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Luu Huu Tho's MA degree is in Principles and Methods in English Language Education at Can Tho University. His research interests are EFL, ELF, and Multilingualism.

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