Examining the Underlying Construct of L2 Lexical Collocation Knowledge

Abstract

Our understanding of second language (L2) learners’ lexical collocation knowledge is largely informed by studies focusing on verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations (Henriksen, 2013). However, whether verb-noun or adjective-noun collocations alone can represent the construct of L2 lexical collocation knowledge is unexplored, leaving room for possible construct under-representation. In addition, a majority of studies have been making inferences about learners’ productive knowledge of lexical collocations based on their performance on gap-filling tasks (e.g., Sonbul & Schmitt, 2013) or translation tasks (e.g., Laufer & Girsai, 2008), although little is known about whether scores from these tasks can be used to make inferences about learners’ productive knowledge of collocations at the sentence level.

To address these gaps, this dissertation investigates the underlying construct of L2 lexical collocation knowledge. More specifically, it investigates (a) whether lexical collocations of one type of grammatical structure can represent the construct of lexical collocations, (b) whether receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations are distinct constructs, and (c) the relationship between the level of L2 literacy and learners’ performance on different tasks on collocations. A total of 72 academic English lexical collocations were selected: verb-noun, adjective-noun, adverb-adjective, and adverb-verb collocations. The experiment consists of four tasks: a sentence production task, a fill-in-the-blank task, an eight-option multiple-choice task, and a phrase acceptability judgment task. A pilot study was conducted including 12 native speakers of English and 21 learners of English. The results suggest that 1) adverb-adjective collocations are the most difficult type of collocation, 2) receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations are different constructs, and 3) production tasks are most informative about advanced learners’ lexical collocation knowledge while the acceptability judgment task is most informative about intermediate-level learners’ lexical collocation knowledge. Implications for proper construct representation and score interpretations of tasks of L2 lexical collocations will be discussed.

References