

Evaluating the effect of data-driven learning (DDL) on the acquisition of academic collocations by advanced Chinese learners of English

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This study aims to explore the effect of data-driven learning (DDL) on the acquisition of academic collocations by advanced Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in a Chinese university. Collocations, prefabricated multi-word combinations, are considered to be a crucial component of language competence which indicates the central role they should play in language teaching and learning. However, collocations remain a challenge to L2 learners at different proficiency levels, and particularly a difficulty to Chinese learners of English (e.g. Fan, 2009; Granger & Bestgen, 2014). From a pedagogical perspective, collocations have so far attracted only limited attention in language teaching in the Chinese language teaching classroom. This study, therefore, focuses on the effectiveness of the teaching of academic collocations to advanced Chinese learners of English, using a specific pedagogical approach, the corpus-based data-driven learning approach (DDL). DDL has been argued to offer an effective teaching method in language learning. However, so far the large-scale, quantitative studies carefully evaluating the effectiveness and assessing the benefits of DDL in the acquisition of academic collocations are limited in number when compared to a different method of teaching of collocations (Bouton, 2010; Chambers, 2005).

This study, therefore, contrasts DDL with another method of teaching of collocations (using of online dictionaries), with regards to the breadth and depth of the knowledge of academic collocations. The study uses data from 120 Chinese students of English from a Chinese university and employs a quasi-experimental method, using a pre-test-and-post-test (including delayed test) control-group research design to compare the achievement of the use of DDL and online dictionary in teaching academic collocations to the Chinese EFL learners. The experimental group uses #Lancsbox (Brezina, McEnery & Wattam, 2015), an innovative and user-friendly corpus tool. By comparison, the control group uses the online version of the Oxford Collocations Dictionary. The results are analysed for the differences in collocation gains within and between the two groups. Those quantitative data are supported by findings from semi-structured interviews exploring learners' attitudes towards DDL and linking their attitudes with the test results. The findings contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness of DDL for teaching academic collocations and suggest that the incorporation of technology into language learning can enhance collocation knowledge.

References

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