Explicit Instruction of Collocations: An Impact on Learners'
Use and Perceptions

การสอนคำเกิดร่วมด้วยวิธีการสอนที่มีกระบวนการและขั้นตอนที่ชัดเจน:

ผลกระทบต่อการใช้และความตระหนักของผู้เรียน

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บทคัดย่อ

ในฐานะที่เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของคำศัพท์ การใช้คำเกิดร่วมในภาษา
อังกฤษที่ถูกต้องนั้นจะสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความสามารถทางภาษา
อังกฤษของผู้เรียนได้ (Richards, 2008) และวิธีการสอนที่มี
กระบวนการและขั้นตอนที่ชัดเจนนั้นมีประสิทธิผลต่อการเรียน
การสอนคำศัพท์ (Conzett, 2000 and Schmitt, 2000) งานวิจัยนี้
มีจุดประสงค์ที่จะศึกษาการใช้คำเกิดร่วมและความตระหนักถึง
คำเกิดร่วมของนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษที่มีผลมาจาก วิธีการ
สอนที่มีกระบวนการและขั้นตอนที่ชัดเจน หลังจากการสอนนั้นผ่าน
ไปแล้ว 1 ปี โดยใช้แบบทดสอบคำเกิดร่วมและแบบสอบถาม
ปลายเปิดกับนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์
มหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น วิเคราะห์คะแนนที่ได้จากผลสอบ โดยค่าเฉลี่ย
และการวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวน วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถาม
โดยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาและแปลงเป็นค่าร้อยละ พบว่านักศึกษายัง
สามารถใช้คำเกิดร่วมบางส่วนได้ถูกต้อง และสามารถใช้คำเกิดร่วม
กลุ่ม everyday verbs และ synonyms and confusable words ได้
ถูกต้องมากกว่า intensifying adverbs นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่ตระหนักว่า
คำเกิดร่วมควรมีการสอนในห้องเรียน เพราะการสอนคำเกิดร่วมจะ
ทำให้นักศึกษาเรียนรู้และตระหนักถึงการใช้ภาษาที่ถูกต้อง และยัง
ส่งผลให้นักศึกษา ได้รู้วิธีการและตรวจสอบการใช้คำเกิดร่วมของ
ตนเองด้วยวิธีการต่างๆ

คำสำคัญ : วิธีการสอนที่มีกระบวนการและขั้นตอนที่ชัดเจน,
คำเกิดร่วม, การใช้และความตระหนักของผู้เรียน

A b s t r a c t

As a part of vocabulary, the correct use of collocations can reflect English language proficiency (Richards, 2008), and explicit instruction is effective for vocabulary learning (Conzett, 2000 and Schmitt, 2000). This study aims to investigate English major students' use of collocations and their perceptions on explicit learning of collocations after a year of instruction. A test of collocations and an open-ended questionnaire were administered to the fourth year English major students at Khon Kaen University, who were explicitly instructed in the use of some collocations. The mean and Analysis of Variance were utilized to analyze the data from the test scores. A content analysis and the percentage was used to analyze the data from the questionnaire. The test scores revealed that the students used some collocations correctly, and they could *use everyday verbs, synonyms and confusable words more accurately than intensifying adverbs.* The students perceived that the instruction of collocations should be done explicitly in class since it helped them to learn and become aware of collocation use as well as knowing how to check their collocation use from various sources.

Keywords : Explicit teaching/instruction, collocations, learners' use and perceptions

Introduction

Language is a medium for communication which is broken down or ineffective when factors for good language performance are used incorrectly or inaccurately. Vocabulary is one of those significant factors that facilitate better performance in the four skills of the English language (Chou, 2011; Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Oya, Manalo, & Greenwood, 2009; Nation, 2001; Stæhr, 2008). Additionally, language capability and vocabulary knowledge account for both academic and social success (Papadopoulou, 2007).

The correlation between vocabulary and language proficiency has been the focus of several studies. Clark and Ishida (2005) suggest that the highest correlation exists between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension as compared with the other skills. Meara (1996) states that learners who recognize and can retrieve more vocabulary are more competent in language skills than those who can recognize fewer vocabulary items. In short, the belief held by teachers and learners of a foreign language is that vocabulary enrichment promotes language proficiency (Lee, 2003 and Barrow, Nakanishi & Ishino, 1999).

Vocabulary is central to language acquisition, whether it is the first, second, or third language (Decarrico, 2001). The importance of vocabulary is emphasized by Wilkins' (1972 : 111) well-known statement, "without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Generally, vocabulary is not merely a word occurring alone without connections to others, but occurs and collocates with other words in chunks; hence, collocation is regarded as important for language use (Hill, 2000).

Collocation plays an important role in various aspects of language

use or in communication. It is a kind of common word combination which is instinctively and naturally used by native speakers (Lewis, 2000). McCarthy & O'Dell (2007) define a collocation as a combination of words which are naturally linked to each other. This chunk of words is considered essential since it is claimed that "collocation is found in up to 70 per cent of everything we say, hear, read, and write" Hill (2000 : 53). Also, Ellis (2001) claims that knowledge of collocation is significant for language knowledge as well as language use. Collocation knowledge is regarded as that which helps language learners successfully move to an advanced level (Richards, 2008).

It is widely accepted that possessing an effective knowledge of collocation can reinforce language competence as well as communicative competence (Darvishi, 2011; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 1997; Yang & Hendricks, 2004). Moreover, it improves speaking, listening, reading and, writing skills (Brown, 1974) and brings the language user a fluency level close to that of native speakers (Darvishi, 2011). Collocation is then essential for language learners in every stage, especially those who desire a high degree of competence in a second language (Nesselhauf, 2003), since it is a central feature of vocabulary (Hill, 2000).

Collocation is difficult for language learners, especially those who are non-native speakers (Stubbs, 1999; Wray, 2002). This would derive from the fact that correct collocation is produced intuitively by native speakers who have naturally learned it by the means of speaking and hearing (Duan & Qin, 2012). On the other hand, non-native speakers deal with formulaic language (e.g., idioms, collocations) by putting words together, and they hope that appropriate language is formed (Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). Even in advanced learners, collocation is also reported

as a problematic issue and a difficult task for them (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Nesselhauf, 2003; Pei, 2008).

In fact, studies on collocation problems are not rare, but most focus on identification of mis-collocations or collocational errors produced by language learners (Darvishi, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003; Wang & Shaw, 2008), rather than assessment after a long period of explicit instruction measuring the retention of such knowledge. There are studies in Thailand which have been well documented which show that Thai learners have problems in using collocation (Malligamas & Pongpairoj, 2005; Mongkolchai, 2008; Phoocharoensil, 2011). The findings from these studies reveal various problems with collocation among language learners, and L1 transfer would be one of them. A good example illustrating these problems would be that of a direct translation of a Thai expression to an English collocation. A learner might say '*My hair is busy*' instead of '*My hair is messy*' (Bennui, 2008). The most frequent type of errors found among undergraduate students was the verb-noun collocation Bhumadhana's & Gajaseni's (2011), and Phoocharoensil's (2011) study show that both high-proficiency and low-proficiency learners have collocation problems both in lexical and grammatical collocation. Lexical collocation is a type of combination made up of only a verb, noun, adjective or adverb and forms predictable combinations, whereas grammatical collocation is made up of verbs, adjectives or nouns and followed by a preposition or a grammatical structure.

The fourth-year English major students at Khon Kaen University have studied English for years and have been involved with English more than students in other fields. They are expected to be more proficient in English and to use it more accurately than non-English major students.

These students have an opportunity to explicitly learn some collocations which are included in the course *English Structure IV*——a compulsory course required for third-year English major students at Khon Kaen University. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate whether learning some collocations explicitly and elaborately would have an impact on their collocation use (after a passage of time) and their perceptions of the explicit instruction of collocations in class.   Therefore, this study aims to answer two research questions (1) *To what extent do the fourth-year English major students at Khon Kaen University use the instructed collocations accurately? (2) What are the students' perceptions of their collocation knowledge and the explicit instruction of collocations?*

Literature Review

Vocabulary learning, collocations and language proficiency

Knowledge of vocabulary has a great impact on language proficiency. To clarify this, Anderson & Freebody (1979) emphasize that vocabulary knowledge can be measured as an indicator of language capabilities. On the other hand, inadequate knowledge of vocabulary limits the capabilities to understand English tests and the ability to express what the language user wants to communicate to others (Folse, 2006). That is why, as Mokhtar (2010) stated, vocabulary knowledge is what language learners apply in an attempt to acquire a higher linguistic competence or become proficient in the English language.

Vocabulary can be acquired through two approaches: explicit and incidental learning (Schmitt, 2000). Explicit learning, though time-consuming, focuses on direct attention to what is to be learned, thereby leading to more acquisition, while incidental learning occurs when

a language learner uses the language for communications (Schmitt, 2000). As explicit learning is effective, many language teachers normally include vocabulary teaching in their language class, expecting that their learners would use the vocabulary productively and purposefully. Productive vocabulary knowledge refers to the capability of using words to properly communicate by means of productive skills, e.g. speaking and writing (Nation, 2001). Some researchers (Laufer, 1998; Laufer & Goldstein, 2004) use the terms *active knowledge* and the *productive knowledge* interchangeably. To be able to use a word productively, one needs to know its pronunciation, spelling, meaning as well as its syntactic and collocational properties (Qian, 2002).

In order to enhance their proficiency in language, learners are required to know the types of words and their combinations (Farrokh, 2012). In addition, learners can enlarge their understanding of words by knowing their collocations (Duan & Qin, 2012). For Duan & Qin, collocation is considered as one of the most important aspects of knowing a word. Definitions of collocation have been given by many linguists (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Lewis, 1994; Moon, 1997; Sinclair, 1991). The term "collocation" (Firth, 1957) refers to a combination of words which normally co-occur or appear together. Sinclair (1991) defines collocation as words which physically occur together or have high chances of being used together. Similarly, Woolard (2000 : 24) defines a collocation as "words which are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance suggests". It seems that the definitions provided by Sinclair and Woolard are a bit different. The former definition uses the co-occurrence of words as a criterion to define collocation, whereas the latter views collocation as a frequency-based criterion. This indicates that collocation

can be viewed variously in both its frequency of occurrence and its combination. Even though collocation is an issue that has gained attention from various researchers, the explicit definitions of collocation have still been opaque; in other words, there is no consensus about how it should be defined (Hussein, 1998). This might be due to the fact that researchers have adopted different criteria to define the meaning of collocation and delimit it from other types of word combinations (Youmei & Yun, 2005).

In her work, Nesselhauf (2003) has discussed the two main approaches for defining collocations, which previous studies have used to view collocations. The first one is known as the frequency-based approach which considers collocation as words that co-occur at a certain distance from each other. This approach is often adopted in studies involved with the computational analysis of syntagmatic relations. The phraseological approach regards a collocation as a combination of words which displays various degrees of fixedness, and is preoccupied with collocation typology (Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009). This approach is widely used in the fields of lexicography and/or pedagogy.

As there are a great number of collocations in English, linguists and researchers are attempting to categorize them by constructing their own criteria (Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1986; Moon, 1997; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000). Collocations can be categorized in various classifications. Mostly, the criteria are based on the structure of word combination (Benson et al., 1986), the frequency of occurrences (Lewis; 2000) and the fixedness of word combinations (Hill; 2000). In addition, some classification criteria share something in common with others, such as James' (1998) concept of collocation, which are arbitrarily combined words; and Hill's (2000)

collocation which is a predictable combination of words. In their book *English Collocations in Use,* McCarthy & O'Dell (2005) apply a lexicography and frequency-based approach with The Cambridge International Corpus of written and spoken English and the CANCOCE corpus of spoken English. They classify collocations into grammatical aspects, special aspects, basic concepts, functions as well as different topics. Therefore, it is impossible to separate one classification from another as they are linked to each other.

The importance of collocation in language has been widely acknowledged in many previous studies (Brown, 1974; Darvishi, 2011; Hill, 1999; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 1997; Nesselhauf, 2003). Historically, Brown (1974) proposes that the knowledge of collocation leads to the improvement of oral proficiency, listening comprehension, and reading speed. According to Brown, language learners can observe the use of language as chunks, as among native speakers, through the learning of collocation. Besides this, the knowledge of collocation helps enhance learners' language, increases their communicative competence, and helps them move toward native-like fluency (Darvishi, 2011). Furthermore, a recent study by Chang, Chang, Chen, & Liou (2008) has concluded that mastering collocation will uplift learners to a higher level of proficiency. A similar notion was also found in Hill (1999) which considers collocation as a key that leads to fluency. For learners who attempt to get a higher degree of competence in a second language as well as those with less ambition, collocation is especially significant (Nesselhauf, 2003). In addition, learners with a good collocation competence will develop the ability to communicate more efficiently because they have "the ability to say more of what they want to say with limited language resources at their

disposal" (Lewis, 1997 : 33). That is why collocation should share a part in our teaching and it needs to be presented in a meaningful context (Hill, 2000). Conzett (2000) discusses explicit vocabulary study by integrating collocations in language courses. Similarly, Woolard (2000) points out the importance of collocation and suggests raising awareness of collocation as well as identifying and teaching collocation in texts.

Studies on collocations in Thailand and the needs for teaching collocations

Regarding studies completed in Thailand, the significance of collocation has been evidenced in previous studies such as Yumanee & Phoocharoensil (2013), which showed that inadequate collocation knowledge leads to collocation errors. Mongkolchai (2008) also studied English collocation ability of third-year English major students at a university in Thailand. The results show that the lack of collocation knowledge, L1 transfer, misuse of verbs, the use of synonyms, and a limited knowledge of culture-specific collocations were factors that influenced the misuse of collocations. Likewise, Phoocharoensil (2011) also found that participants' translated collocation from L1 transfer, synonym use and overgeneralization were the causes of collocation errors. Similarly, the recent study by Yumanee & Phoocharoensil (2013) has reported similar sources of collocation errors among both high-proficiency and low-proficiency groups. It was found that collocation errors, produced by these groups, were derived from L1 interference and other causes, such as the use of synonyms, creation of wrong combinations, and a lack of collocation knowledge.

Therefore, collocation deserves a place in classroom teaching, and L2 learning has been clearly justified by the previous studies. A number

of linguists and researchers suggest that collocation should be taught and learnt (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Darvishi, 2011; Kennedy, 2012; Kim, 2009; Nesselhauf, 2003; Palmer, 1993; Youmei & Yun, 2005). Importantly, Lewis (2000) claims that teaching collocation should be given a top priority in every language course.

Methods

This research study was conducted to investigate the impact of explicit instruction on knowledge, use and perceptions of collocations after a year of the said instruction. This part discusses the research procedures (including participants), the explicit instruction, and the research instruments.

Participants

The participants of this present study were 82 fourth-year undergraduate English major students studying at Khon Kaen University. They were selected by a purposive sampling technique as a representative of the whole (Davies, 2007), based on the following reasons:

First, the students were non-native English speakers who have studied English for at least 10 years and their English skills could be considered as intermediate or higher (some are upper-intermediate level). As English major students, they have been expected to have good command of English, or to use English more skillfully and appropriately than non-English major students.

Second, these fourth-year students attended the course *English Structure VI* when they were third-year students. This course includes collocations as a part of the contents, so they had a chance to learn some collocations explicitly. With the passage of time, the students can

be a legitimate source of data in terms of their use of collocations and their perceptions on the teaching of collocations in class. Therefore, the data obtained from this group was used as guidance to the policies for the course as well as program improvement, in terms of teaching and learning of collocations in future.

The explicit instruction

The explicit instruction was based on the Present-Practise-Produce paradigm (Lewis, 2000). The instruction included some selections from the book by McCarthy & O'Dell (2005). The collocations in the book were created from the Cambridge International Corpus of written and spoken English and the CANCODE corpus of spoken English. The Cambridge International Corpus consists of over 750 million words of authentic English combined from "books, newspapers advertising, letters and e-mails, websites, conversations and speeches, radio and television" (McCharthy & O'Dell, 2005 : 4). In their book, McCharthy & O'Dell categorized collocations into issues (e.g., *Grammatical aspects of collocations and Special aspects of collocations*) and topics (e.g. *Travel and the environment, People and relationships, Leisure and lifestyle, Work and study, Society and institutions, Basic concepts, and Functions*). The students were presented with examples from these selections. They completed the following exercises and were assigned to produce some tasks using the collocations they had learned from the class; they finally received responses and feedback from the teacher. Each lesson took around three hours according to the teaching paradigm.

Research instruments

As this study aims to investigate both the learners' use and perceptions after a year of instruction, two research instruments were utilized to collect

the data: a test of collocation use and an open-ended questionnaire. The instruments are discussed as follows.

A test of collocation use

This test aimed to investigate the students' retention of some collocations. The test items were based on topics and exercises in *English Collocations in Use* (McCharthy & O'Dell, 2005). All the items were explicitly taught in the class beforehand. It was impossible to include all issues and topics in the test, so the test included general terms and words frequently used in daily life: intensifying adverbs, everyday verbs, and synonyms and confusable words from *Grammatical aspects of collocations and Special aspects of collocations* (McCharthy & O'Dell, 2005).

1. **Intensifying adverbs:** This group of words refers to adverbs that modify the degree of specific adjectives. Instead of saying very or very much, these adverbs are naturally used or co-occur with specific words. Intensifying adverbs in this study include *highly, absolutely, utterly, bitterly, deeply, ridiculously*, and *strongly.*

2. **Everyday verbs:** These are verbs that EFL learners might have problems with. McCharthy & O'Dell (2005) divided these verbs into three groups: Group 1 includes make and do; Group 2 includes become, get, go, and turn; and Group 3 includes *have, pay* and *take.*

3. **Synonyms and confusable words:** These confusable words include verbs and adjectives which provide similar meanings. The common synonym pairs include *close* and *shut, start* and *begin, big* and *large, charge* and *load, injure* and *damage, grow* and *raise,* and *end* and *finish.* The other group includes verbs connected with gaining, winning and achieving which are *gain, win, earn, make, achieve,* and *beat* and *defeat.*

Some of these words and collocations were selected for the test items since they appear at the beginning parts of the books, which would imply their frequent use, and it is assumed that language learners would need them for daily life communications. Also, they were taught to these students in class. The test was divided into three parts according to the groups of selected collocations discussed above (see Appendix A). The test was checked for validity and edited by a Thai English teacher and a native English speaker before it was administered.

The students were to fill in gaps and choose the appropriate collocation from the provided distracters, since these types were provided in exercises in the book by McCharthy & O'Dell (2005). With the help from a native English speaker, the scores were rated as 1 (correct) and 0 (incorrect) as the test was objective.

An open-ended questionnaire

To investigate the students' opinions and perceptions on the teaching of collocations, an opened-ended questionnaire was constructed and administered with the sample group. This questionnaire allowed the respondents to express their thoughts freely. In this way, more data could be obtained. As a questionnaire can be a self-administered interview, the construction of the questions was based on the *Six classes of interview data, e.g. Facts about the 'here and now', What the respondent knows, Facts about past events, Feelings, Attitudes or opinions, and beliefs* (Davies, 2007). The questionnaire consisted of six questions which included facts, feelings, attitudes or opinions as well as beliefs from the students (see Appendix B). The data gained from the students would be sufficient to answer the research questions. As the questions were structured or predetermined, the conformity of the answers were quite fixed, and the

data easy to code and analyze (Grix, 2010). This questionnaire was checked for its validity by an expert and edited by an English native speaker before it was administered.

Results

The level of students' accuracy in the use of the collocations

The test scores revealed that the fourth-year English major students used the collocations accurately to some extent. According to Table 1, the full score of each type of collocation was 10, and a few students achieved a full score. This implies that some students could use the collocations accurately. Considering the minimum scores from each type, we can see that some were quite low: 0 for intensifying adverbs, 3 for everyday verbs, and 2 for synonyms and confusable words. This means that some students still had difficulties with the use of collocations. In other words, collocations are still problematic for the English major students.

Table 1 The students' accurate use of different types of collocations

Types of collocations					Scores	
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Min.	Max.
Intensifying adverbs	82	5.097	1.91556	.21154	0.00	10.00
Everyday verbs	82	6.670	1.62583	.17954	3.00	10.00
Synonyms and confusable words	82	7.134	1.94214	.21447	2.00	10.00
Total	246	6.300	2.02408	.12905	.00	10.00

On average, the students received the highest mean score (7.134) from the part covering synonyms and confusable words. The second highest mean score was from *everyday verbs* (6.670), and the lowest mean score was from *intensifying adverbs* (5.097). These mean scores imply that the students have difficulties with the use of *intensifying adverbs* the most, while *synonyms and confusable words* are the least problematic.

Table 2 The multiple comparisons of the mean scores

Types of collocations (I)	Types of collocations (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Intensifying adverbs	Everyday fverbs	-1.57317*	.28634	.000
	Synonyms and confusable words	-2.03659*	.28634	.000
Everyday verbs	Intensifying adverbs	1.57317*	.28634	.000
	Synonyms and confusable words	-.46341	.28634	.272
Synonyms and confusable words	Intensifying adverbs	2.03659*	.28634	.000
	Everyday verbs	.46341	.28634	.272

The mean difference is significant at .05 level.

To see implications of the mean scores clearly, a multiple comparison was done with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the results are shown in Table 2. According to the table, there are two pairs of mean scores which show a significant difference at .05 level: between *intensifying adverbs* and *everyday verbs* (sig. = .000), and *intensifying adverbs* and *synonyms and confusable words* (sig. = .000). The mean scores between everyday verbs and synonyms and confusable words show no significant difference (sig. = .272). This means that the students used some types

of collocations more accurately than others. The findings to these figures are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 The students' more accurate use of different types of collocations

Students' more accurate use of the collocations	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Everyday verbs > Intensifying adverbs	1.57317*	.28634	.000
Synonyms and confusable words > Intensifying adverbs	2.03659*	.28634	.000

The mean difference is significant at .05 level.

Table 3 shows that the English major students used everyday verbs and synonyms and confusable words more accurately than intensifying adverbs. It can be concluded that, among the three types of collocations, intensifying adverbs is the most problematic for the English major students. Moreover, it can be said from the mean scores that the students still had problems with the overall use of collocations to some extent.

Table 4 illustrates the students' accurate use of collocations: intensifying adverbs, everyday verbs, and synonyms and confusable words. In this study, 82 students completed the test, and the accurate answer to each item is reported in the number of students and their percentage. The higher percentage was less difficult, while the lower percentage was more problematic to the students. For intensifying adverbs *highly successful* was less problematic than *highly controversial*. With everyday verbs, *(hair) go grey* and *have a heart attack* was more problematic than carry *(something)*, *spend vacation*, and *earn money*. In terms of synonyms and confusable words, *have a break* and *take a risk* was more problematic than *(people) injured* and *(buildings) damaged.* To sum up, the students could use some collocations accurately but still had difficulties with others.

Table 4 The students' accurate use of the collocations

Intensifying adverbs	No. of students	Everyday verbs	No. of students	Everyday verbs	No. of students
highly successful	63 (76.82 %)	carry (something)	72 (87.8 %)	(people) injured	79 (96.34 %)
strongly opposed	51 (62.2 %)	spend vacation	71 (86.58 %)	(buildings) damaged	79 (96.34 %)
ridiculously easy	51 (62.2 %)	earn money	70 (85.35 %)	grow some crops	70 (85.36 %)
ridiculously cheap	49 (59.75 %)	win a medal	62 (75.6 %)	finish this homework	69 (84.14 %)
utterly ridiculous	45 (54.87 %)	become extinct	58 (70.73 %)	start new project	66 (80.48 %)
deeply ashamed	43 (52.43 %)	achieve goal	55 (67.07 %)	the universe began	60 (73.17 %)
deeply concerned	41 (50 %)	make friend	51 (62.2 %)	raise buffaloes	54 (65.85 %)
bitterly disappointed	34 (41.46 %)	(tomatoes) turn red	43 (52.44 %)	end (writing) a novel	52 (63.41 %)
utterly stupid	29 (35.36 %)	have a heart attack	40 (48.78 %)	take a risk	30 (36.58 %)
highly controversial	14 (17.07 %)	(hair) go grey	23 (28.04 %)	have a break	26 (31.7 %)

The students' perceptions on collocation knowledge and explicit instruction of collocations

Most of the English major students (72 or 93.50 %) perceived that collocation knowledge is highly useful for communication, while only 5 or 6.5 % of them said that the knowledge was not useful or important. They stated that good collocation knowledge would be attributable to the image of being well-educated, correct and a natural language user, better professional language skills, as well as more effective communication.

Sixty students reported that they paid attention to collocations when using English for communications: 36 (46.75%) of them paid much attention while 24 (31.16%) students did not pay much attention to collocations. They mentioned that paying attention to the correct use of collocations would help communication to be more effective, powerful, and natural. One student stated that s/he would lose self-confidence in using the language if s/he was corrected by a native speaker. Though all the students recognized the usefulness and importance of collocation knowledge, a few of them (17 students or 22%) did not pay attention to collocation use at all. They said that they focused on the content and meaning, not the grammar. One said that collocations were not important when speaking, while another used his/her intuition when using the language.

When using the language, most of them (69 or 89.61 %) said that they would check their collocation use, while a few (8 or 10.39 %) would not. The English major students used different methods to check their use of collocations, and some used more than one method. There were six methods the students reported for checking collocations. From 77 students, 45 students used Google; 34 students consulted dictionaries; 13 students

asked their friends; 6 students asked their teachers; and 2 students used collocation software.

Many of the English major students did not have any ideas about collocations before they had chance to learn them explicitly in the *English Structure IV* course. More than half of them (42 or 54.54 %) reported they had no ideas, just learned them from the course and realized what words needed to go with certain other words. Twenty-eight students or 36.36 % said they knew about them but not much——they had learned some from high school, but did not know they were called collocations. Only seven or 9.09 % reported they had learned a lot about collocations before this class and realized that some words must occur with certain other words: one said that s/he knew about this but was not aware of it, and one learned some collocations from movies and used them with native speakers.

Most of the students (76 or 98.70 %) said collocations needed to be taught explicitly. They said collocations needed to be introduced earlier and continually so that students could improve their language skills, especially writing and speaking, and communicate effectively with foreigners. Additionally, collocations should be emphasized in every English course. Only one student (or 1.3%) said there was no need to teach collocations, reasoning that they were used incidentally enough in each English language course.

The students perceived that the explicit teaching of collocations helped them gain collocation knowledge to some degree. Sixty-seven students or 87.01 % said they had gained much knowledge. They added that the class was not sufficient, and that it encouraged them to study more outside class. Ten students or 10.99 % revealed that they did not

achieve much, saying that the textbook should contain more categories of collocations. They added that they could not remember collocations which they did not use in daily life. One student said collocations must be acquired through much reading practice, as well as using them in written and spoken communications. To this point, all of them said they had gained at least something from the class.

To sum up, the students' scores from the test and their responses from the questionnaire reveal that collocations are still problematic to non-native English speakers, including English major students. The explicit teaching of collocations lends itself to more accurate use and awareness and knowledge of those collocations to some extent. It causes the students to become aware of their language (collocation) use as well as to check their use of collocations using various methods. Also, the students realized that collocations needed to be introduced or taught explicitly, since they could improve their language skills and use the language more naturally.

Discussion and Conclusion

The impact of explicit instruction

Explicit instruction of collocations was found to be effective to raising awareness and developing collocation knowledge and its accurate use. With explicit teaching, the students learned the words and completed various communicative activities (Nation and Newton, 1997). Conzett (2000), Schmitt (2000), Sökmen (1997) and Nation & Newton (1997) discuss the importance of the explicit teaching of words to second language learners.

Firstly, explicit teaching of the collocations helps students to gain some knowledge of collocations through noticing and practicing them

(Lewis, 2000). As was found from the students' scores on the test, the students used some collocations accurately. In the class, the students were introduced to collocations and examples before doing the exercises, and were still able to produce some tasks using the introduced collocations. Their production included written and spoken activities as well as role plays. They received feedback or responses to their performance. All of these helped them increase accuracy of their collocation use (Conzett, 2000). Therefore, explicit instruction provided a chance for the students to consciously learn the language and to involve them with practicing and noticing the collocations, thereby facilitating further acquisition of the language (Lewis, 2000).

Secondly, the explicit instruction helped the students in raising awareness of collocation. From their responses to the questionnaire, the students considered collocation useful and important for communication, and most of them reported using various methods for checking collocations. Woolard (2000) suggests that, to raise awareness of collocation, the use of mis-collocations should be a focus for the students. He adds that teachers should have a significant role to help their learners indentify collocations in texts. With explicit teaching, the collocations are the focus, and the presentation helps the students to identify the correct use of the language. The teacher did also provide some feedback and responses, including mis-collocations, to the students' production. All of these helped them raise their awareness of collocation use.

Difficulties of collocations to non-native English speakers

The test scores reveal that the students used some of the collocations they had learned in class inaccurately. This implies that the English major students still have problems and difficulties with collocations, even though

they had an opportunity to learn the collocations explicitly. Stubbs (1999) and Wray (2002) point out that collocation is also problematic to foreign language learners. Similarly, Bahns & Eldaw (1993) and Nesselhauf (2003) postulate that collocations are difficult even for advanced or high-proficiency learners. In general, the fourth-year English major students are considered intermediate to advanced learners since they are more proficient in English than learners from other fields. However, they still had difficulties with collocation use. This finding is in line with Phoocharoensil's study (2011) which found that both high and low proficiency language learners have problems with lexical collocations. The potential difficulties of collocations to the English major students resulted from two aspects——low intuitive knowledge and infrequent practice of collocations.

Intuitive knowledge of collocation

The students had difficulties with some collocations (e.g. *highly controversial, utterly stupid, have a heart attack*). They could not use these collocations correctly as do native speakers. This is because collocation derives from intuitive knowledge, and native speakers produce correct collocations intuitively since they have learnt them as chunks from speaking and hearing them (Duan & Qin, 2012). In contrast, foreign language learners learn the language from words and their meaning as well as the language structure (as do the Thai students). They produce the language by putting together words the meanings of which they have internalized. They might produce language that sounds awkward if they lack collocational competence (Hill, 2000). This can result from the influence of their first language which is sometimes generalized by first language learners when applied to L2 (Duan & Qin, 2012). For instance, instead of saying '*have a heart attack*', some students made the mistake

of saying '*get a heart attack*'. As Durrant & Schmitt (2009) postulate, non-native language learners cope with the formulaic language (e.g., idioms, collocations) by putting words together, hoping that the language would be appropriate and correctly formed. Darvishi (2011) concludes that with mother-tongue interference, lack of real knowledge and concepts of the collocations, foreign language learners may produce unnatural language. As there are many factors mentioned, internalizing collocations is reported as a difficult task for L2 learners (Pei, 2008).

Infrequent practice of some collocations

The students had more difficulties with intensifying adverbs (e.g. utterly, highly, strongly) than the other types. These adverbs are used to show strong feelings or emotions, and they are alternatives to the words *very* or *very much* (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). They strongly collocate with some specific words, for example *deeply concerned, bitterly disappointed, highly controversial,* etc., and combining them with others produces unnatural language. These words are more problematic for foreign language learners than using the alternative very much. It is likely that intensifying adverbs are difficult for the students since they do not use these adverbs frequently in their daily life. With infrequent use or lack of practice of these intensifying adverbs, it is quite hard for the students to acquire and use them accurately even though they were explicitly taught in class.

Some implications for teaching collocations and for further studies on Thai students

The data imply that some collocations are still problematic to the students and reveal that collocations need to be introduced or explicitly taught; therefore, language teachers should include collocations when

teaching new words or vocabulary. The teaching of collocations should be done continuously in every language class as well as at every level. The teachers may focus on frequent collocations appearing in the text as well as mis-collocations the learners produce so that they become aware of collocations or the occurrence of some words with certain words, but not others. Paying attention to collocations will help reduce mistakes in target language use (Phoocharoensil, 2013). Anyhow, studies on the teaching of English collocations and focusing on mis-collocations still provide some room for investigations with Thai students.

Teachers should promote communicative activities, strategies and exercises for learners to practice the use of collocations (Hill, Lewis & Lewis, 2000). As native speakers acquire collocations through speaking and hearing, the teaching of collocations should be done with exposure to authentic language (produced by English native speakers). This authentic language would provide the learners with real and accurate language use. By noticing what they hear, they would have the chance to learn and acquire the language (Lewis, 2000). To help them more, task-based instruction——pre-task, task cycle, and post-task——would also help promote language acquisition (Littlewood, 2007 and Skehan,1998). Also, the learners should have enough time and chances for producing and practicing the language, and the teacher should give them feedback on their collocation use. The selections of activities, strategies and exercises suitable for Thai students are still waiting for some investigation.

Teachers should introduce various methods (e.g. collocation dictionaries, textbooks, online corpora, Google) for learners to check their collocation use. Computer technology, if available, would be

an alternative method for checking lexical archives. Concordances would be beneficial for inductive learning (Conzett, 2000 and Flowerdew, 1996). Data-driven learning (DDL) by the use of corpora and concordances might be introduced in the language class as an approach to checking collocations (Gabel, 2001). As Google contains very large corpora with substantial concordances, it would be interesting to introduce them to language classes as a tool to check collocations. Using Google to search for collocations would help learners find relevant information (Teeler and Gray, 2000). However, the use of Google needs to be done with awareness, since language use on the Internet derives from various sources, and much is not from English native speakers. Perhaps, this point can be developed as further study with some groups of English language learners.

As this study was conducted after a year of instruction, there were no scores from the pre-test to compare with the scores obtained from this study, so as to see the immediate impact of the explicit instruction. Therefore, further studies should focus on the experiment   in which the pre-test and post-test can be used to investigate the effectiveness of the instruction through the comparison of the mean scores from the tests.

Conclusion

Explicit instruction of collocation has a positive impact on learners' use of collocation and yields positive perceptions on its effectiveness. It helps reinforce learners with some knowledge and accurate use of collocation as well as raising awareness of language use. With this method, learners were presented with collocation in context, completed some exercises, produced their own language and received feedback from the teachers. The learners had a chance to notice and practice

the language, so they could learn and acquire some collocations. Also, the teaching made them aware that, as language learners, they need to use the language correctly as do native speakers, so they need to check their language use with their available and preferable methods. However, some collocations are still problematic to language learners since they come from intuitive knowledge, and the learners do not frequently use them. Collocation, therefore, needs to be continually taught at all levels to help English language learners reduce their language errors and to use the language naturally. Also, investigations of the teaching of collocations need to be conducted for more insights as well as appropriate approaches for Thai learners.

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