Investigating the effectiveness of a form-focused vocabulary game

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Abstract: Learning prepositional collocation (late for...) is difficult. Teacher's hunch: playing a form-focused vocabulary game helped learners use prepositions accurately. Collecting quantitative data in a quasi-experimental classroom study determined how many of 20 collocates were retained by participants 24 hours and 17 days after the game. Analysis: the experimental group (n=29) retained statistically significantly more collocates (median=11) than the control group (n=26, median=5).

1 Introduction

Vocabulary games are useful learning tools. Games that promote repetition of target vocabulary aid retention of collocation (language chunks).

The Game

Each chair in a circle signifies 1 target collocate. Best Chair calls out a target. The student in that chair must quickly call out another target, and so on. Mistakes require the student to sit in the Worst Chair with learners moving 1 chair to their left. New chair = new target.
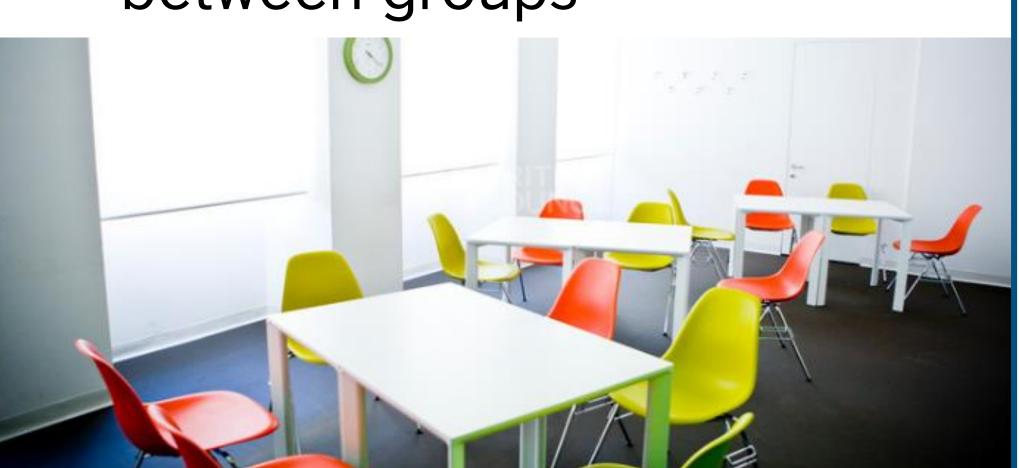
Collocates

cope with, suffer from, reason for, example of, addicted to, blame for, congratulate on, confess to, typical of, accuse of.

2 Objective of Study

- Use systematic evaluation to examine hunch of the effectiveness of game for learning vocabulary
- Measure retention rates of target language 24 hours and 17 days post-game
- Triangulate with qualitative feedback from learners

3 Methodology

- Control (n=26) and treatment (n=29) between-groups study design
- Data triangulation: learning-based (retention rates) and response-based (learner feedback) evaluation
- Classroom not 'perfect' experiment (sample of convenience) but has ecological validity
- Random assignment, pre- and 2 x post-testing
- Variables: dependent = collocate recall; independent = effects of repetition
- Learner answer validity (knowledge or guess?)
- Cross-sectional study (different levels measured at same time)
- Identical pre- and post-tests (order changed to avoid practice effects): using rapid onset to test automated knowledge
- Game-play only difference between groups

4 Results & Key Findings

Study groups not equal in age, level, or L1, but relatively balanced.

Improved gain scores (newly retained collocates) for the **treatment** over the control group:

Gains of 20 collocates across experimental groups

	Game group (n=29)		Control group (n=26)	
	24-hour post-test	17-day post-test	24-hour post-test	17-day post-test
Mean gain	8.69	9.72	5.31	5.35
Median gain	9	11	5	5
Range	3-15	3-16	0-12	0-14

These results are *statistically highly significant* (t-tests using independent samples assuming unequal variances) with a probability <0.01% that these scores were achieved by chance. The difference between the groups was *very large* (effect size = 1.41).

5 Conclusion

The game does aid retention of chunked vocabulary, by means of repetition. This provides lexical priming opportunities in the brain and strengthens links (collocation) between head words and their prepositions.

6 References

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