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Assessing knowledge of collocations among Japanese university students

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TITLE

Assessing knowledge of collocations among Japanese university students

RELEVANT SIG

Testing and Evaluation

FORMAT

Research-oriented Oral Face-to-face presentation (25 minutes, including Q&A)

Short English description

KEYWORDS

Testing, vocabulary, collocations

ABSTRACT

Some recent research finds that Japanese learners of English have limited ability to produce acceptable collocations for common English words in tests designed to measure collocational competence. Further, with gains in vocabulary knowledge, there was little or no improvement in collocational competence. These findings led to claims that excessive focus on the learning of individual words and neglect of communicative skills practice in high school leaves students with a poor understanding of how words combine. In this talk, I will compare the performance of 154 Japanese university students ranging in CEFR levels from A2 to C1 on a kanji translation test based on Webb (2008) and a test of receptive knowledge of 6 types of collocations. Although correlational analysis of scores on these tests indicates that receptive knowledge of common English collocations increases with gains in vocabulary knowledge, there was considerable variation in average performance in each collocation category. For example, participants, including some higher learners, performed especially poorly in the noun + preposition category indicating that certain types of collocational knowledge may develop later than others. I will conclude with implications for the teaching of collocations.

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