An Application of Consciousness-Raising Activities When Teaching Vocabulary to English Majors

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Abstract

This paper reports on a series of Consciousness-Raising (C-R) activities focusing on prefabricated verbs chunks and verb patterns. An 18-week experiment was carried out incorporating the C-R activities into a Comprehensive English Course. A writing task and semi-structured interviews were administered after the experiment. Results indicated that (1) the frequency and accuracy of verb patterns used by Experimental Group (EG) were higher than those in the Control Group (CG); (2) C-R activities promoted the use of the students’ reference material and their ability to notice gaps in meaning, enhanced their interest and confidence in learning English, and guided their personal learning of vocabulary; (3) the EG generally liked the activities.

Key words: verb; prefabricated chunk; pattern; C-R activity

1. Prefabricated verb chunk, verb pattern and C-R activity

There is a general consensus that lexicons are of critical importance for English learning. In lexical learning, prefabricated chunks and patterns have been increasingly recognized as essential elements (McCarthy, 1990; Nation, 2001; Sinclair & Renouf, 1988). A prefabricated chunk refers to a sequence of two or more specific words that frequently occur together and appear to be stored and retrieved as wholes from memory, such as to look after someone and it seems that (see review in Wray, 2000; Wray & Perkins, 2000). A pattern is defined as a grammatical structure which is regularly associated with a specific
word and contributes to its meaning. It can be identified “if a combination of words occurs relatively frequently, if it is dependent on a particular word choice, and if there is a clear meaning associated with it” (Hunston & Francis, 2000: 37). For example, \textit{V of n/-ing} is a pattern of verbs \textit{boast}, \textit{speak}, \textit{approve}, \textit{tell}, \textit{daydream}, \textit{conceive}, etc. Notably, most words used with a pattern can be categorized into particular groups with specific meaning, and a particular meaning is usually expressed by certain patterns (Hunston & Francis, 2000).

Although prefabricated chunks and patterns are essential lexical elements, Chinese learners’ use of them, especially of prefabricated verb chunks and verb patterns, is not satisfactory. A verb pattern “includes only those words that are typical of, or significant to, a particular verb, not those that are just a part of general clause structure” (Francis, Hunston & Manning, 1996: vii). \textit{Collins COBUILD Grammar Patterns 1: Verbs} (Francis et al., 1996) listed 87 types of verb patterns and the verbs used with them. Contrastive Interlanguage Analyses discovered that many of the prefabricated verb chunks used by Chinese learners were not correct, and many of the verb patterns they used expressed inaccurate meanings (Pu, 2000, 2003; Sun, 2004).

These inaccuracies may be caused by inadequate teaching of vocabulary and the methods of learning in China. First, vocabulary teaching has not been given due importance (Pu, 2000). Second, when teaching vocabulary, teachers overemphasize the Chinese translation of words and pay insufficient attention to prefabricated chunks and patterns (Pu, 2000). Third, prefabricated chunks and patterns are only taught as they arise. The relationship between chunk, pattern and meaning is left unexplained, and no systematic or principled way of dealing with prefabricated chunks and patterns has been used (Jiang, 2007; Pu, 2000). Misled by teachers, learners usually read or write new words repeatedly until they can remember their Chinese equivalents, and chunks and patterns are memorized one by one as they arise. However, translating and rote-learning are not suitable for learning verbs as (1) verbs usually have more than one meaning, (2) a verb may be transitive when expressing one meaning and intransitive when expressing another meaning, and (3) multi-word verbs also have multi-meanings, which are usually not the sum total meaning of their components (Gairns & Redman, 1986).

Instead of translating and rote-learning, some scholars have suggested using more cognitive Consciousness-Raising (C-R) activities to teach prefabricated chunks (Thornbury, 1998) and patterns (Sinclair & Renouf, 1988; Willis, 1990). C-R activities are deemed particularly important for chunk and pattern teaching, as there are endless chunks and patterns in English (Hunston & Francis, 2000; Hunston et al., 1997; Willis & Willis, 1996). For example, Willis and Willis (1996) proposed a list of C-R activities: identification and consolidation, classification, hypothesis building and checking, cross-language exploration and reconstruction. Hunston et al. (1997: 214) suggested three way of raising learners’ awareness of patterns: asking learners to identify given patterns in texts, giving learners words sharing the same pattern and asking them to identify the meaning groups, and asking learners to look for words used with a particular pattern outside the classroom.

C-R activities have distinct features different from translating and rote-learning. (1) They highlight the connection between form, meaning, and function (Nunan, 1991; Rutherford, 1987). (2) They use inductive and implicit approach (Willis, 1993). (3) They
adopt a discovery rather than a presentational approach. That is, teachers provide data which illustrate the target feature for learners’ attention. Then learners utilize intellectual efforts to construct, test or modify hypotheses about the form, function, and use of the language (Ellis, 1992; Rutherford, 1987). (4) They are “concept-forming oriented” and do not require learners to repeat or produce the target feature. This is contrary to normal “practice” (Ellis, 1992: 234). Based on these features, C-R activities are regarded as beneficial for prefabricated verb chunk and pattern teaching in China.

However, how to use C-R activities to teach prefabricated chunks and patterns has been insufficiently studied, and very few empirical studies to date have examined their efficacy. Focusing on these gaps, the present research puts forward a series of C-R activities to teach prefabricated verb chunks and verb patterns, and investigates their effects with an experiment among English majors. This study is one of the first attempts to establish a link between C-R activities and verb chunk and pattern teaching in China, and it addresses the following questions:

(1) Do C-R activities improve learners’ use of prefabricated verb chunks and patterns in terms of frequency?
(2) Do C-R activities improve learners’ use of prefabricated verb chunks and patterns in terms of accuracy?
(3) What are learners’ comments on C-R activities?

2. Research design

2.1 Participants
The participants were 120 English majors studying in China for associate degrees. They were in the first year of a two-year program at Huazhong Normal University. Their average age was 26.53 years, ranging from 19 to 44. When they entered the program, they had been assigned into two equal-sized classes by the English Department after a placement test. In Class One there were 48 females and 12 males; in Class Two there were 50 females and 10 males. No participant was taking other English courses besides the compulsory ones.

2.2 Group assignment
Class One was assigned as the control group (CG) and Class Two as the experimental group (EG). In order to check whether CG and EG had similar English proficiency before the experiment, a pre-test was conducted using CET6 papers in the summer of 2007. No participant had practiced the papers before. Results showed that the mean grade in the CG was 51.6917 and therefore slightly higher than that of the EG, which was 51.5000. An independent-samples t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between the CG’s and EG’s pre-test scores (Sig. = .907). Therefore, the two groups were considered homogeneous in English proficiency. Judging from the mean scores, the participants were regarded as intermediate English learners.
2.3 Experiment procedure
The CG and EG were taught by the same teachers in all compulsory courses except Comprehensive English, in which the first researcher was responsible for teaching the EG and another teacher was in charge of the CG. The two instructors were the same sex and of similar age, education and teaching experience. The teaching of the two classes followed the same syllabus, course plan and class hours. The only difference was that the CG was taught traditionally while C-R activities were incorporated into the EG’s Comprehensive English lessons. With regard to vocabulary, traditional teaching refers to the teaching practice mentioned in the first part of this paper, including emphasis on Chinese translation equivalents of single words, and dealing with prefabricated chunks and patterns one by one only when they arise. The experiment lasted 18 weeks.

The C-R instructions were in four parts:
(1) At the beginning, the first researcher introduced chunk, pattern, pattern flow, the relationship between pattern and meaning, the criteria for choosing prefabricated chunks and patterns, and methodology when using such reference materials as Collins dictionaries and Cobuild corpus. Some sample activities are as follows:
   a) Introducing chunks. What do the underlined parts have in common?
      The Lexical Approach has been around since Michael Lewis published the book 10 years ago. It seems, however, that many teachers do not have a clear idea of what it looks like in practice (from Islam & Timmis, 2006).
      Pedagogic rationale: to raise learners’ awareness of a chunk.
   b) Introducing pattern using the following table (from Francis et al., 1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Verb patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple patterns</td>
<td>V, V n, V -ing, V that, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple patterns with prepositions and adverbs</td>
<td>V about n, V as adj, V from n, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex patterns</td>
<td>V n prep, V n as adj, V n from n, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pedagogic rationale: to introduce the basic knowledge of a pattern.

   c) Verb-categorization. The following verbs can be used with the same pattern, V of n/-ing: boast, hear, speak, approve, tell, daydream, smell, conceive, know, stink, repent, warn, learn, think, smack, taste. Categorize the words into four meaning groups: ①talking about something; ②thinking or having an opinion about something; ③knowing something; ④something seems to be something (from Francis et al., 1996).
   Pedagogic rationale: to raise learners’ awareness of the relationship between pattern and meaning.

   d) Pattern flow. Ask learners to divide the sentence “I’m looking forward to hearing from you as soon as possible” into several patterns.
   Pedagogic rationale: to help learners realize many sentences consist of pattern flows (Hunston et al., 1997).
(2) Fifteen-minute C-R activities were performed at three weeks’ intervals. A typical example is “revision and comparison”, and there were three steps:

a) Rewrite the story below (from Timmis, 2006) by using more chunks and patterns.

When I was in elementary school, my music teacher gave us an exam. We had to sing a song in front of our classmates. She didn’t give a paper test. She played the harmonica, and we had to sing a nursery rhyme. My class number was thirty-six. She called on us one after another. Ultimately, my examination time came. My heart began to flutter with fear…

Pedagogic rationale: to enable learners to examine language from the perspective of chunks and patterns and to elicit their output.

b) Read another version of the story. Which one is better and why?

When I was at elementary school, my music teacher set us a really tricky exam. Instead of setting us a written exam, she made us sing a song in front of the whole class, while she played the harmonica. She called us up in class number order: my number was 36 so I had to wait a long time for my turn, which made me even more nervous. Eventually, it was my turn. My heart began to flutter with fear…

Pedagogic rationale: the second version was written by a native speaker while the first was by a Korean. This task raises learners’ awareness of how chunks contribute to idiomatic, fluent and accurate language use.

c) What are the differences between the second version and your own revised version?

Pedagogic rationale: for language-to-language development to occur, learners must notice the gap between their own production and that of native speakers (Nunan, 1991: 150).

(3) Some activities were incorporated into textbook teaching. There was an example below.

The following extract is from “The Burden of Stereotypes” in the Comprehensive English textbook (Zhang, 2001). Four C-R activities can be used to deal with the vocabulary.

Some people, bearing physical stigmata, face such stereotypical perceptions on a daily basis: members of some ethnic groups, the crippled, the obese, the ugly, to name just a few. The unfairness of the perception—and its matching dehumanizing treatment—is a fact of life. The individual is powerless in the face of such cultural bias.

a) Identification. Identify key new words (in rectangular boxes) and key chunks and patterns (underlined).

Pedagogic rationale: to make clear what to teach first and allow learners to identify chunks and patterns.

b) Pattern-summarization. Summarize the patterns of face from a teacher’s concordance (Most concordance lines are from the text).
Facing Old Age in American Society

difficult for most Americans to face growing old: negative stereotypes and individual is powerless in the disabling of the self-concept. To problems that the youth now use wrinkle creams, get our faces lifted, have our hair transplanted.

Pedagogic rationale: to allow learners to observe language and de-contextualize patterns.

c) Pattern-categorization. Categorize the following verbs according to their patterns: see, view, consider, deem, find, judge, regard, think. ① V n n; ② V n adj; ③ V n to-inf; ④ V n as adj; ⑤ V n as n/-ing

Pedagogic rationale: to help learners distinguish synonyms according to their patterns.

d) Oral gap-filling. Close your textbooks and listen to the teacher reading the text. Speak out the chunks when the teacher gaps them.

Pedagogic rationale: the immediacy and challenge to memory creates good motivation and it can be a very effective way of revising chunks (Islam & Timmis, 2006).

(4) The EG was asked to collect prefabricated verb chunks and summarize particular verb patterns outside the classroom. Extensive reading was recommended by the teacher as the best way to practice. The teacher also evaluates learners’ work and discusses with them. Excellent work is shared with the whole class.

2.4 Data collection

A writing task and semi-structured interviews were used in this study. The writing task investigates the frequency and accuracy of prefabricated verb chunks and patterns in learners’ writing; the interview examines the EG’s attitudes towards the activities. Writing was used here as it elicits learners’ output of prefabricated verb chunks and patterns. In addition, it imposes less stress on intermediate EFL learners and is easier to operate than a speaking assessment. The writing task was designed, after discussion, by the teachers of the English Department, and the topic was closely related to the learners’ current lifestyle and interests.

Data collection was in two steps:

(1) At the end of the experiment, the CG and EG were required to write a composition about “the Advantages/Disadvantages of the Internet” within 30 minutes and under classroom conditions. They were told that the writing was a part of the final assessment for the Comprehensive English module.

(2) After the writing task, 30 learners were randomly chosen from EG by a colleague of the first researcher. They were called into a classroom one by one and interviewed by this colleague. The interviews were carried out in Chinese in order to make it convenient for the interviewees to understand the interviewer and express themselves. First, the interviewees were asked to write down their answers to a question on a piece of paper: “Do you like the activities the teacher used to teach chunks and patterns?” The answers were
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in a five-point Likert scale: A, B, C, D and E, which represents “I like them very much”, “I like them a little”, “I don’t really mind”, “I dislike them a little” and “I dislike them very much” respectively. Then they were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the activities. The interviewees were further asked to explain the reasons for their answers to these two questions.

2.5 Data analysis

Prefabracted chunks and patterns are closely related. Chunks usually co-occur with certain patterns (Sinclair, 1991), and the notion of pattern takes the chunk principle much further because patterns account for much more language (Hunston et al., 1997). Hunston and Francis (1998) argued that highly frequent collocations such as it occurs to me that and it drives me mad which seem to be fixed phrases are actually extreme cases of patterning where lexicons are restricted. In this research, only verb patterns were analyzed as it is easier to summarize and compare them. The researcher resorted to the list in Francis et al. (1996) to decide whether a verb structure is a real pattern.

Quantitative analysis of the writing included two parts: first, the verb pattern frequencies in the CG’s and EG’s writing were compared. There were took four steps: (1) Identifying and counting verb patterns in each composition. Where different verbs were used with the same pattern, they were considered as different verb patterns. For example, take n as n and regard n as n were two verb patterns. In addition, where the same verb pattern was used more than once in a composition, it was counted only once. (2) Counting the tokens (total words) of each composition. (3) Calculating the verb pattern frequency of each composition. To facilitate analysis, the tokens of each composition were normalized to 100. So the verb pattern frequency was computed as follows:

\[
\text{verb pattern frequency} = \frac{\text{number of verb patterns}}{\text{number of tokens}} \times 100
\]

(4) Comparing the verb pattern frequencies in the CG’s and EG’s writing through independent samples t-test.

The second part of the analysis compared the accuracy of the verb patterns used in the CG’s and EG’s writing. The procedure was as follows: (1) Identifying and counting the correctly used verb patterns in each composition. Where the same correct verb pattern was used more than once in a composition, it was counted only once. (2) Calculating the verb pattern accuracy of each composition. The verb patterns were also normalized to 100, and the verb pattern accuracy was as follows:

\[
\text{verb pattern accuracy} = \frac{\text{number of error-free verb patterns}}{\text{number of total verb patterns}} \times 100
\]

(3) Comparing the verb pattern accuracies in the CG’s and EG’s writing through independent samples t-test.

The analysis of the interviews was more analytical. For the question “Do you like the activities the teacher used to teach chunks and patterns?”, the interviewees who chose answers A, B, C, D and E were counted, and their proportion in all the interviewees were
Their responses to the strengths and weaknesses of C-R activities were further categorized, and then the raw frequency of each category and its percentage in all the interviewees was calculated.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of verb pattern frequencies and accuracies in the CG’s and EG’s writing. Independent samples t-tests indicated that there was significant difference between verb pattern frequencies in the EG’s and the CG’s writing (Sig. = .000), and the verb pattern accuracies in the EG’s and the CG’s writing were also significantly different.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>group</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10.294</td>
<td>3.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14.429</td>
<td>4.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66.467</td>
<td>9.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>71.175</td>
<td>10.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group 1 is CG and Group 2 is EG.

Therefore, C-R activities which emphasize prefabricated verb chunks and patterns improve English majors’ use of verb patterns in writing in terms of frequency and accuracy. In line with previous studies (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1997), this finding provides strong support for the conclusion that teaching chunks improves learners’ English output in terms of accuracy, fluency and use of idioms. It also finds evidence for the statement in Hunston et al. (1997) that pattern teaching promotes the accuracy, fluency and flexibility of learners’ language. To be specific, if a learner knows the pattern of a word, he is more likely to use the word accurately. And if he possesses many patterns which express one meaning, he may flexibly use them alternatively and thus increases his frequency of verb pattern use. The findings of this study also point to the inadvisability of Chinese English teachers’ belief that they can be of little help to learners in lexical learning (Pu, 2000). Carter (1987) assumed that the reason why teachers had emphasized grammar instead of lexicons was that grammar looks finite while lexicons seem infinite. If this is the case, this study should convince Chinese teachers that they can help learners’ lexical learning through C-R activities.

This study yields another finding: the EG generally had a supportive attitude towards the C-R activities. Table 2 shows that 23.33% of the interviewees liked the activities very much and 50% of them liked the activities a little. So in total, 78.33% of them were supportive of the activities while 26.67% of them disliked the activities a little, and none of them chose “I don’t really mind” or “I dislike the activities very much.”
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Table 2. The EG’s like and dislike of C-R activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw frequency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comments of the interviewees also lend convincing support to the effects of the C-R activities. Table 3 shows the interviewees’ responses to the strengths and weaknesses of C-R activities. Altogether, 83.33% of the interviewees reported they learned new vocabulary through the activities. About 30% of them thought they knew what lexicons to learn and 30% thought they knew how to learn them. Then, 70% of them reported that they got to know the differences between their own writing and that of native speakers, 80% found the use of concordances or dictionary useful, and 80% considered the activities interesting. About half of the sample read a lot outside the classroom, and a half also held that they learned vocabulary through reading. Finally, 43.33% reported they were more confident in learning vocabulary.

According to the statistics in Table 3, C-R activities help raise learners’ awareness of typical chunks and patterns, develop their analytical and inductive ability, promote the construction, testing and modifying hypotheses about language, and thereby achieve autonomous chunk and pattern learning. These findings are consistent with the conclusions in previous research (Hunston & Francis, 2000; Nunan, 1991; Willis & Willis, 1996). In this study, the C-R activities as a whole provided guidance for the EG’s self-study. Learners got to know what to focus on in lexical learning and how to examine lexicons with the help of reference materials. In addition, different C-R activities served different purposes. Revision and comparison raised learners’ awareness of how chunks and patterns contribute to idiomatic, fluent and accurate language use. Concordance building and pattern summarizing inspired learners to think, analyze language and draw their own conclusions rather than accepting and memorizing what was taught. Verb categorization enabled learners to realize the close relationship between pattern and meaning, and helped them distinguish verb synonyms according to their patterns. From the affective perspective, the C-R activities promoted learners’ interest and confidence in language learning. During the experiment, the first researcher was greatly impressed by the learners’ enthusiasm for the new activities. They participated in the activities actively, discussed a lot with the first researcher and their peers, and always did their assignments attentively.

Table 3. Strengths and weaknesses of C-R activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Raw frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Learnt new vocabulary in the activities</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knew how to learn vocabulary/chunks/patterns</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knew what kind of vocabulary/chunks/patterns to learn</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knew the difference between their own writing and that of native speakers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Found use of concordances/dictionary useful</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Raw frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Read a lot after class</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>56.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learnt vocabulary through reading</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Found activities interesting</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Felt increased confidence in learning vocabulary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>Felt there were too many words/chunks/patterns in the activities to be remembered</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Found the work too difficult</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, nearly one quarter of the interviewees disliked the activities a little (Table 2). 76.67% of them thought some activities were over-loaded with words, chunks or patterns, and 60% reported some activities were too difficult (Table 3). This dissatisfaction has several causes. First, presenting too many words, chunks or patterns to intermediate learners at a time was considered to be too difficult. Some previous studies have pointed out that learners’ initial vocabulary knowledge (both in terms of depth and breadth) plays a significant role in their lexical learning process and affects lexical teaching (e.g. Qian, 2004). No participant in this study has passed TEM4 and the mean scores of the CG and the EG in the pre-test were lower than 52. Therefore, presenting so many verbs sharing one pattern, or so many chunks sharing one meaning may not be an effective strategy at this level of language acquisition. Second, it is unlikely that activities can cater equally well to learners with large differences in proficiency level. The EG are English majors with varied educational backgrounds: some achieved their associate bachelor’s degree by self-study while others attended college; some took the present program right after they were awarded their associate bachelor’s degree while others took it after years of work experience. Consequently, the English language proficiency levels were different. It is probable that the activities cannot meet the needs of all learners and that learners at lower levels may have more difficulties in handling the activities. Third, it was not easy for the EG, a group of adult learners, to overcome the ingrained perceptions of language and language learning, or to change their old learning habits. Therefore, what the EG was actually asked to devote time to in class may have been in contradiction with what they expected to devote time to. This is what Harwood (2002: 8) defined as the “face validity” of language teaching.

4. Conclusion

The empirical study showed that the C-R activities improved the verb pattern frequency and accuracy in learners’ writing. In addition, most participants liked the activities, and reported that the activities helped them learn new vocabulary more efficiently, encouraged them to notice the gap between their own language use and that of native speakers, and enhanced their interest and confidence in learning English. Participants also pointed out that some activities were over-loaded with lexicons or were too demanding. This may be
due to the participants’ unsatisfactory English proficiency, within-group heterogeneity, and/or ingrained learning habits.

This study has significant implications for China’s English teaching with regard to whether and how vocabulary should be taught. First, teachers may realize that contrary to their beliefs, they can play a guiding and facilitative role in learners’ vocabulary learning. Therefore, it begs the question of how to teach vocabulary rather than whether to teach it. Second, this paper calls for a shift of focus in China’s vocabulary teaching. Since each meaning is associated with certain patterns, typical meanings and corresponding chunks and patterns should be taught together with lexicons. For example, when to dismiss is taught, the following information should be conveyed: to express “to think something is unimportant to think about”, dismiss is used with V n as n or V n; to express “to stop thinking about something”, dismiss is used with V n from n or V n; to express “to fire somebody”, dismiss is used with V n. Third, Chinese teachers should be encouraged to use C-R activities for chunk and pattern teaching. However, the activities should not include too many lexicons, as Chinese learners tend to memorize the vocabulary the teachers list.

There are limitations to this study: the experiment was restrained to a limited number of participants at intermediate level only, and no follow-up study was conducted to check whether the positive effects of the activities lasted. In addition, the experiment has different pre- and post-test, so there is no strong evidence to show that the EG’s use of prefabricated verb chunks and patterns are greatly improved compared to its previous use. Focusing on these points, future studies could be taken among learners of other proficiency levels and the same pre- and post-test can be given. It would also be interesting to investigate whether and to what extent the participants still use the new methods in their own lexical learning after a few months. Some researchers may also challenge the findings of arguing that the EG in this study received outside-class exposure while the CG did not. This made it difficult to determine whether it was the type or amount of learning activity that counted. However, it may be very difficult for each teaching experiment to control the activities in both groups to exactly the same amount. And one point this study tries to make is that if new activities motivate learners to learn outside the classroom, it would be safe to say they are beneficial to language learning and therefore worth practicing.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Professor Wen Qiu Fang, Professor Susan Hunston and Professor Nigel Harwood for their insightful suggestions on the earlier draft of this paper.
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(Copy editing: Sue Kay)