Summer 8-13-2015

Je me suis couché de bonne heure: The Explicit Teaching of Collocations to High School French 2 Students

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JE ME SUIS COUCHÉ DE BONNE HEURE: EXPLICIT TEACHING
OF COLLOCATIONS TO
HIGH SCHOOL FRENCH 2 STUDENTS

by
Callie A. Kunz

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
August 2015

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Most wonderful of all are words, and how they make friends with one another.

≈ O. Henry
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my Capstone advisors, Liz Will and Betsy Parrish. Without your guidance, encouragement and expertise, I could not have completed this project. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my family, who ate a lot of fast food during the last several months, and never once complained. And last of all, I want to thank my husband, Larry Kunz, for being my best friend, my advisor extraordinaire on all things having to do with statistics, and for supporting and cheering me on every step along the way.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of my biggest frustrations as a French teacher is watching my students struggle to express themselves. I can see by looking at their faces, how difficult it seems for most students to learn and retrieve the words and phrases they need to express themselves. No matter how many times we circle back to reinforce, and sometimes relearn vocabulary, students, including the most studious ones in my advanced classes, often experience a literal loss for words. I frequently wonder why they cannot seem to remember what they have learned or why what they do know seems lacking or insufficient. I often ask myself what I, as their teacher, could be doing differently to help them store, retrieve and use vocabulary in order to become more effective communicators in French.

There are obvious solutions of course, including requiring more homework and independent practice. I can always ask students to focus more earnestly on vocabulary acquisition. But, frankly, I believe that most of my students have reached the threshold of what they can be expected to accomplish during individual practice. Although I spend a lot of time in class reviewing and practicing vocabulary, I do not feel that I have tried every possible option that I could to help students grow their French lexicon. I do, however, believe that there are solutions to this conundrum. The desire to improve in this aspect of my teaching practice is my motivation and the source of my interest in finding new and innovative ways to approach vocabulary instruction.
Students learning a second language often find themselves in a learning rut, stuck at a low or mid-intermediate proficiency level, frustrating learner and teacher (Hill 2001). Some students appear to have a difficult time retrieving the vocabulary they have studied in the past. Others seem to have difficulty expressing themselves using the vocabulary they have learned, finding it inadequate and/or irrelevant to the task of communicating what it is they want to convey. Additionally, I believe, and I think most world language teachers would agree, that all second language learners struggle to put the words they do know together into phrases that sound like something akin to what a native speaker might say.

Many researchers (Granger, 2011; Hsu & Chiu, 2008; Kosolritthichai, 2011; Lewis, 2001; Mel’čuk, 1993; Myers & Chang, 2009; Peters, 2009; Wray, 2002) have suggested that one possible solution to this vocabulary dilemma is to teach collocations, or phrases made up of words that are frequently grouped together. Intrigued by the notion of focusing on phrases over single word units, I focused this study on assessing the value of teaching collocations in addition to single words during vocabulary instruction. This chapter introduces the potential for explicitly teaching collocations to high school French 2 students and explores why doing so may help them learn the vocabulary they need to communicate more effectively and in a more natural, native-like manner.

Collocations

Collocations, simply put, are clusters of words that are found frequently together. More technically speaking, collocation describes the way in which words naturally occur together in text in statistically significant ways (Lewis, 2001; Woolard, 2001). They are
often formulaic sequences, or groups of words that are stored and retrieved whole from memory (Wray, 2002), that have become conventionalized in a given language as attested by native speaker judgment and/or corpus data (Boers & Lindstromberg 2012). This is a wide definition and covers many different kinds of word combinations, including idiomatic expressions and the social exchanges we use on a daily basis. Different word combinations can be made into collocations, including adjective + noun (a huge profit), noun + noun (a pocket watch), verb + adverb (live dangerously), and adverb + adjective (completely soaked) (Hill, 2001; Lewis, 2001).

Collocations may be strong and highly predictable or weak and more variable. One way to conceptualize collocations is to imagine them on a continuum. At one end of the continuum, they are strong and fixed, as when the presence of one word means you strongly expect the other word will be there too. Idiomatic expressions are examples of strong collocations. At the opposite end, collocations are weak and variable; in which case, the words appearing together can vary greatly (Cowie & Howarth, 1995). From my perspective as a second language teacher, it is more important to note that, according to Howarth (1998), second language (L2) learners’ difficulties lie chiefly in the middle of the continuum.

In recent years, linguists’ interest in collocations and formulaic sequences has expanded, resulting in a growing body of evidence showing that learning multiword, lexical phrases is beneficial to L2 learners. Vocabulary size has always been a good predictor of general language proficiency. Additional studies have shown that L2 learners’ knowledge of collocational phrases has also been found to correlate
significantly with language proficiency ratings, (Hsu & Chu, 2008; Keshavarz & Salimi, 2007). Eyckmans, Stengers, Boers, & Housen (2011) reported strong associations between the number of formulaic sequences produced by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners during retelling tasks and the scores for oral proficiency awarded to them by independent assessors. Correlations were especially noticeable when assessors were asked to focus on the speaker’s range of expression.

In addition to improved language production skills, breadth of knowledge of collocations has also been shown to be beneficial for comprehension and fluency (Boers et al., 2006; Dai and Ding, 2010; Hsu and Chiu, 2008). Many figurative idioms pose comprehension problems even when they are accompanied by ample contextual cues (Boers, Eyckmans, & Stengers, 2007). Martinez and Murphy (2011) demonstrated how lower-intermediate learners often attribute an inappropriate meaning to idiomatic expressions based on the meanings of the individual words in the phrase. Metaphor and phraseology are interconnected since words that are used in a conventionalized metaphorical sense tend to occur in a narrowly restricted range of word combinations. Learning the phraseological behavior of a word that has many possible definitions overlaps with learning its range of meanings and functions (Boers & Linstromberg, 2012).

Depth of lexical knowledge regarding collocations has advantages as well. When collocational phrases are well entrenched in memory, the surrounding text becomes more predictable. This eases processing so that attention can be given to parts of the discourse that are less formulaic and more unpredictable. Boers and Lindstromberg (2012) argue
that it is only when a phrase is firmly embedded in long-term memory that it qualifies as truly formulaic for a user. According to Wray (2002), native speakers are likely to have stored common word sequences holistically, in such a way that these chunks can be recalled from memory as prefabricated units, circumventing the need to assemble the phrases word by word. Experiments with native-speaker participants have shown that formulaic word strings are processed significantly faster than non-formulaic controls with shorter reaction times in lexical decision and grammaticality judgment tasks (Durrant & Doherty, 2010). Other studies confirm faster self-paced reading (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Tremblay, Derwing, Libben & Westbury, 2011), and faster silent reading (Schmitt & Conklin, 2012; Siyanova-Chanturia, 2011). Nonnative participants who were involved in these studies also processed the formulaic word strings significantly faster than the non-formulaic sequences, although, predictably, the overall speed of processing was always slower than that of native speakers (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008).

Last of all, it has been suggested that formulaic language facilitates fluency in language production. Evidence that collocational knowledge helped language learners come across as fluent L2 speakers was reported in the studies by Boers et al. (2006) and Stenger et al. (2010, 2011), in which students’ reliance on collocations in L2 narratives was positively correlated with their proficiency rating in general and with scores for fluency as well. It is hypothesized that using pre-formed phrases allows the person who is talking to buy additional processing time while their thought process jumps ahead. The speaker is able to plan for content and linguistic form without having to worry about word selection (Skehan, 1998). Interestingly, one of the ways to recognize a formulaic
sequence in real-time, native speech is the absence of hesitations within a word sequence. In normal speech, hesitations normally occur in parts discourse that connect the collocational or prefabricated phrases (Boers et al., 2006). In other words, most speech is a series of short, formulaic phrases that are connected together into one coherent whole.

This research suggests that teaching collocations to my students as part of regular vocabulary instruction holds promise as a way to make their vocabulary learning more useful and productive. In addition, learning collocations appears to be one possible path towards attaining better listening and reading comprehension skills, not to mention improved fluency and native-like language production when speaking and writing.

Role of the researcher

This case study took place in my high school French 2 class. As the regular classroom teacher of this group of students, we spent fifty minutes a day together. During this study, I continued in my role of teacher and added that of researcher. This is a comfortable role because, as part of my professional development, I often engage in action research in the classroom. My students know that I regularly collect and analyze data related to their performance on tests and assignments, and use that data to inform instruction and to implement interventions when necessary.

During the course of this study, I continued to teach the class in the same format as usual. There were no changes in classroom procedures or expectations. Students participating in the study continued to meet with their regular classes. The only changes in instruction were the incorporation of collocations as part of our regular vocabulary study,
the addition of a few new activities, and the introduction of ‘noticing’ as a learning strategy.

I understand that because I was the regular teacher of the class and had established an amicable working relationship with my students, I could not be perfectly objective in my role as researcher. I realize that I have preconceived beliefs about my individual students’ abilities and their individual strengths and weaknesses as second language learners that may have impeded my ability to evaluate them dispassionately. Therefore, recognizing my student-teacher relationship as a potential distraction from the integrity of this study helped me comprehend the importance of maintaining an accurate, anonymous and impartial record of student data.

Background of the Researcher

I have been learning and teaching French since 1976. I have, in my lifetime, experienced several different second language acquisition models. As a result, I tend to draw on a variety of models in my teaching and to focus on the strengths of each method. I strive to incorporate a variety of researched-based, proven, best-practice teaching approaches in my classroom instruction. My goal is to provide a challenging yet fun environment for students to learn and progress in second language study. Since it is generally acknowledged that student engagement leads to better learning outcomes (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006), I endeavor to keep the students interested and involved in the learning process.

I have taught French in this particular school district for the last seven years and have taught levels 1 through Advanced Placement (AP). During the time of this study, I
was teaching at a new location and had two sections of French 1 and three sections of French 2. I enjoy my job and I especially relish the delights and challenges of working with teens. Teaching has been my passion from a young age, and I am grateful to be able to continue educating and mentoring adolescents. Inspiring students to become more culturally aware collectively and as individuals, and to engage in the mind-broadening task of learning a new language brings me intense satisfaction.

During the process of evaluating my teaching style in preparation for this study, I have come to realize that, in recent years, I had gradually, but unintentionally, drifted in the direction of focusing more on grammar than on vocabulary acquisition and retention. When I critically examined my lesson plans from past units, I was dismayed to see how many grammar presentations I had accumulated in my resource folders. I have always envisioned myself as communicative in my teaching style and have been striving to meet the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standard of 90% of instructional time in the target language. Upon continued reflection, I eventually decided that the reasons for this heightened focus on grammar were immaterial, and that I needed to take a step back, determine what I am doing well, and decide what needs to be changed in order to realign my teaching with my underlying beliefs about language learning.

Guiding Questions

With the realization that I had drifted away from some of my core beliefs about language teaching, I felt a need to bring my methodology back in line with what I believe to be best practice. This realignment included putting greater emphasis on vocabulary
instruction, retention and use. Focusing on collocations was one way to achieve this goal.

During this study, I focused on introducing collocations to my French 2 students, with the belief that it could aid them in achieving a greater depth of vocabulary knowledge and improve their ability to comprehend and communicate in French. In addition, I was curious to know about the affective value of introducing collocations into the students’ vocabulary repertoire. I used the following questions to guide my study:

- With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing task?
- To what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced my research topic and explained its relevance to me as a high school French teacher. I have briefly explained collocations and how learning them can be beneficial to second language learners. I have discussed my background and explained why the study of collocations interests me as a researcher. In Chapter Two, I provide a synopsis of the literature that examines collocations in greater detail and from different linguists’ points of view, briefly explain collocations in the French language, and provide a working definition of collocations for this study. I also review additional literature pertaining to the importance of teaching collocations. Chapter Three describes how the study is designed and introduces the methodology used for collocation instruction. Chapter Four discusses the results of the study and Chapter
Five evaluates the data collected during the study. The document ends with a discussion of the study’s limitations, its implications and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of explicit instruction of lexical collocations to high school French 2 students. Through assessment and classroom research, my colleagues and I have identified inadequate vocabulary knowledge to be one impediment to student success, especially in language production tasks. During this study, I provided explicit instruction of selected collocations, chosen for their relevance to the themes we were exploring, measured the effects of this instruction on a writing task, and evaluated students’ perceptions about learning collocations as part of vocabulary instruction.

This chapter explains collocations in greater detail and discusses the role of collocations in developing language proficiency. Second, it includes an explanation of how collocations are defined and studied in French linguistics. Next, the pedagogy for teaching collocations is reviewed. Lastly, the need for additional research in high school language classrooms is shown.

What is a collocation?

A general definition of collocation is the tendency of one word to co-occur with one or more words in a particular domain. According to Lewis (2002), collocation is the phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur naturally in text and spoken language with
greater than random frequency. He concurs with Cowie and Howath (1995) that collocations range from completely fixed (strong), such as pure idioms, to open (weak), which involve elements that are relatively freely combinable.

A key characteristic of collocations is that their constituents can only be combined contextually with a limited number of other words. For instance, in English we say “stab wound” and not “stab injury,” even though “wound” and “injury” are synonymous and either would be grammatically correct. Conversely, we say “internal injury,” not “internal wound.” Combining words that do not regularly co-occur, or in a way that is non-contextualized, is one way that second language (L2) learners display their non-native status (Lewis, 2001).

Firth, although not the first to use the term, introduced “collocation” into linguistic theory in 1957 as part of his Theory of Meaning (as cited in Myers & Chang, 2009) and initiated the systematic study of collocations. In defining collocation, Firth argued that you know a word by the company it keeps. Since their initial introduction into the field of linguistics, many scholars have studied collocations and there has been considerable discussion over an exact definition. Most linguists agree that the most fundamental way to categorize collocations is by whether or not they are grammatical collocations or lexical collocations (Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1997). Grammatical collocations are word groups that are together because of a grammatical structure, such as a verb followed by a particular preposition. Examples include phrases like “to account for” and “adjacent to.” Lexical collocations are all other contextualized word
combinations that are together for reasons other than a grammatical requirement. This study focused on lexical collocations.

There are several terms currently in use to describe collocational phrases. These terms include “recurrent word-combinations”, “phraseological units”, “prefabricated patterns” “prefabs,” “formulaic expressions,” “word strings,” “lexical phrases,” and “lexical chunks” (Gledhill, 1995). Each of these names suggests a slightly different definition of collocation, but many researchers appear to use them interchangeably.

One approach to explain and categorize collocations uses Cowie and Howarth’s (1995) four level scale of collocation complexity, which was mentioned in the introduction. This scale illustrates a continuum of word combinations. At the first level, idioms are treated as frozen collocations, accepting no inserted words, and therefore, are the least complex. Variation subsequently increases with complexity.

1. Idiom
   
   bite the dust, shoot the breeze, kick the bucket

2. Invariable collocations
   
   break a fast, from head to toe, shrug a shoulder

3. Collocation with limited choice at one point
   
   have/feel/experience a need [for noun phrase]
   take/have/be given precedence [over noun phrase]

4. Collocation with limited choice at two points
   
   as dark/black as night/coal/ink
   get/have/receive a lesson/instruction [in noun phrase]
According to Howarth (1998), L2 learners’ difficulties lie chiefly in using invariable collocations and collocations with limited choice at one point. When discussing how to classify collocations, he stated that the most significant challenge for language learners lies in differentiating between combinations that are free and those that are somehow limited in substitutability. He goes on to add that making this differentiation is important to do, because it entails distinguishing between “what is semantic and thus generalizable and what is collocational and therefore, highly specific…” (Howarth, 1998, p. 42).

In my observation, there are four predominant trends in how collocations are examined and discussed by linguists: the lexical composition trend, the formulaic language/semantic trend, the structural pattern trend, and the discoursal-rhetorical trend. The lexical composition trend looks at collocations as ways of describing word meanings at different levels. The formulaic language/semantic trend maintains that semantic properties of lexical words are the key for determining what words combine into collocations. The structural pattern trend relies on grammatical patterns to describe word combinations as collocations. The discoursal-rhetorical approach focuses on the textual and pragmatic functions of collocations, their role in language acquisition and their use in texts.

The lexical composition trend

The lexical composition or “Firthian” trend sees collocation as a way of describing word meanings at different levels. To rephrase, words receive enhanced or new meaning when combined with new partners within a collocation. This statistical and
textual philosophy became popular with the advent of large-scale, computer-based corpus studies of texts, as exemplified by the work of Sinclair (1987). His studies demonstrate that the vicinity of a given lexical item is not haphazard. He argues that, far from depending on ‘open choice’ or compositional meaning, our default system of interpretation is controlled by the ‘idiom principle,’ writing that there are “virtually no impossible collocations, but some are more likely than others” (Sinclair, 1987 p. 411).

Supporters of this approach claim that psycholinguistic studies, which have shown that the meanings of idioms can be directly accessed without passing through a stage of literal interpretation, sustain this assertion (Gibbs, 1985). Advocates of the lexical composition trend also treat collocations as a separate and independent entity from grammar. Additionally, they propose that collocation patterns are best examined and analyzed through lexical analysis that emphasizes the sequence and co-occurrence of lexical units.

The semantic trend

Semanticists view the semantic properties of words as the basis for deciding which words combine and which words do not. The approach stems from an attempt to describe why certain words are used with certain other words. For example, if the words strong and powerful are synonymous, why does powerful collocate with car (powerful car) but strong (strong car) does not? Why does strong collocate with coffee, but powerful does not? And yet both adjectives collocate with argument (strong argument and powerful argument).

According to the semantic point of view, words coalesce into a collocation because they obey inherent semantic and syntactic patterns. For example, rancid
collocates with butter, lard, oil and salad dressing since they all have the same feature of “oily” in common (Decarrico, 2001). Collocations can therefore be categorized to the extent to which they form fixed groupings. They can range from free collocations, which are less compositional (blow a trumpet), to restricted collocations, which are more compositional, (blow a fuse), figurative idioms (blow your own horn) and pure idioms (blow a test) (adapted from Howarth, 1996: 32-33).

This method of classifying expressions compares increasing syntactic invariability or frozenness to increasing semantic particularity or opacity. A fixed or frozen expression is one that cannot be transformed in the usual generative sense of the term. For example, a pure idiom is supposed to resist passivisation (the test was blown by me) and clefting (it’s a test that has been blown). From a semantic point of view, blow a test is opaque since it’s meaning, to do poorly on a test, cannot be predicted by its individual words. In contrast, blow your own horn is relatively transparent and it can be decoded to signify “to promote yourself” (Frath & Gledhill, 2005).

On the surface, the semantic trend appears to provide a reasonable, objective way of classifying different types of collocational phrases. Unfortunately, it does not explain the large number of idiosyncratic collocations that are arbitrarily restricted, which weakens the premise of words forming collocations by obeying inherent semantic and syntactic patterns. For example, why can flawless, immaculate, spotless and unblemished be used to describe complexion, but only the adjectives flawless, and immaculate can be used to describe a performance?
The structural trend

The structural trend focuses on the belief that collocation is affected by structure and, therefore, collocational knowledge should be examined by considering syntactic features. Mitchell (1971), the leading proponent of this approach, contends that in order to determine the nature of collocation, linguists should consider grammar and lexis as one entity. He suggests the concept of root to the study of collocations. According to Mitchell, the abstraction of a word form is called the root, while the word is the attachment of inflectional marking to that root. Furthermore, he proposed that collocations should be studied within grammatical matrices.

Greenbaum (1970) also emphasized the influence of structural patterns on collocation. He maintained that a disadvantage of a purely item-oriented approach is that it obscures syntactic restrictions on collocations. He wrote that without tying collocation to syntax, any two lexical items could collocate at an arbitrary distance (Greenbaum, 1974). For example, it is acceptable to say: his gratitude overwhelms us, but not we overwhelm his gratitude. The acceptability of the collocation of the lexical items gratitude and overwhelm can only be determined by syntax.

Many consider the standout achievement of the structural trend promoters to be the compiling of the BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English (Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1986), which is regarded as the first attempt to organize English collocations. The wordlist, interestingly, includes both lexical and grammatical collocations. In addition, through researching such a vast collection of collocations, structural proponenters were able to provide
a well-developed, feasible and empirically based framework for the study of collocational phrases.

The discoursal-rhetorical approach

The discoursal-rhetorical approach has been embraced by a number of functional grammarians and discourse analysts, including Nattinger and De Carrico (1992). They dispense with the traditional debate about compositionality and examine instead the textual and pragmatic functions of collocations, their role in language acquisition and how they are used in text. According to this approach, phraseological units are not defined by strict criteria, but are viewed as more or less stylistically marked members of a family of expressions. An example of a family of expressions could be the phrases *to be sacked, to be fired, to be dismissed, to be let go, and to lose one’s job*. Since these phrases are not related by form but rather by function, they can be treated at the paradigmatic level of single-word units. It follows, therefore, in such cases, that the question of fixedness and opacity become irrelevant (Frath & Gledhill, 2005).

Collocations in French

Francophone linguists tend to take a narrower view of collocation than their English-speaking peers, giving the term a more restricted definition, which describes them as a common combination of words in a *rapport syntagmatique* (syntagmatic relationship). A syntagmatic relationship refers to syntax, or the relationship among linguistic elements that occur sequentially in a phrase. Another difference is that in English, both grammatical collocations and lexical collocations are acknowledged. In French, the study of *la*
phraseologie tends to focus solely on lexical collocations in the middle of the continuum of fixed (strong, idiomatic) and variable (weak) (Bossé-Andrieu & Mareschal, 1998). From a French language point of view, collocations are defined as binary word combinations with limited combinatorial capacity which are found together frequently in the discourse of a linguistic community (Bosse-Andrieu & Marechal, 1998.) Interestingly, in literature French-speaking linguists frequently define these collocational associations between words using terms more commonly associated by English speakers with mathematics, such as binary, affine, combinatorial, order and product.

German linguist, Franz Joseph Hausmann has been the central figure in the discussion of collocations found in European languages. Hausmann uses the terms “base” and “collocator” to describe the relationship between words in the phrase. In his view, the two constituents of a collocation keep their semantic autonomy and the meaning of a collocation can be deduced from its elements (Hausmann, 1984). The elements do, however, have a hierarchal relationship. The base does not depend on the collocator, but the collocator is a function of the base. The collocation needs the base in order to get its full meaning. For example, in the French collocation essuyer un affront (to be offended), the base word is affront (insult). The verb essuyer (to wipe), under the influence of affront, takes the meaning of ‘to suffer’ and no longer retains its literal meaning. Hausmann lists six primary collocation types that can be found in French (Hausmann, 1999). These types are listed as follows with the base words bolded.
1. **noun** (subject) + *verb*  
   *la colère s’apaise*  
   the anger wears off

2. *verb* + **noun** (object)  
   *tenir un journal*  
   to keep a diary

3. *verb* + adverb  
   *exiger énergiquement*  
   to insist firmly

4. adverb + **adjective**  
   *gravement malade*  
   critically ill

5. **noun** + prep + **noun**  
   *marché du travail*  
   labor market

6. **noun** + adjective  
   *célibataire endurci*  
   confirmed bachelor

It is worthwhile for researchers to note that the majority of bases are nouns and many French collocation dictionaries are written using nouns as the searchable term.

It is also important to note that from a syntactical point of view, French collocations are unchangeable, fixed, linguistic units (Kosolrithichai, 2011). For example, when adding the descriptive adjective *américain* to the expression *une voiture de location* (rental car), it must be added after the collocational phrase, becoming *une voiture de location américaine*. In a phrase not containing a collocation, the adjective would normally be placed directly after the noun (*une voiture américaine*).

Because there are many ways of defining and studying collocations, it is logical to establish one, straightforward definition before beginning a study in order to create a standard and minimize confusion. For this current study, the parameters that I have established to define collocations are relatively simple. Collocations are phrases comprised of semantically autonomous words which frequently co-occur and that are closely adjacent. They are phrases that are conventionalized by linguistic communities and which are more or less fixed, with a foundation or base word and a collocator.
What role do collocations play in language ability?

According to Mel’čuk (1993), the frequency and quality of collocation use distinguishes a native speaker from a very advanced non-native speaker (NNS). The instruction of French collocations or phraseology to NNSs is a focus of recent research in the area of French as a foreign language (FFL) instruction. In fact, the authors of *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CECRL), the guide that all European countries use to maintain unified standards for language teaching and learning, suggest that teaching collocations is as important as teaching general vocabulary (Council of Europe, 2001, p.87).

When discussing his Lexical Approach Method to language teaching, Lewis (2001) postulates that fluent speech consists primarily of rapidly produced short phrases as opposed to formally correct sentences. The central tenet of his method is that language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar. According to Lewis, most of the phrases that are used in common communicative acts are relatively fixed and prefabricated lexical items. Examples of commonly used lexical phrases include social greetings, such as “Happy New Year,” and common politeness phrases like “No, thank you” and “Don’t worry about it.” Access to a comprehensive mental lexicon of these prefabricated units of speech provides the foundation for social interaction.

In his book, *Teaching Collocations*, Lewis (2001) adds to his hypothesis as to why this is important to L2 learners. To summarize, in addition to providing a lexicon of prefabricated phrases, collocational knowledge helps students avoid the pitfall of using unconventionalized or non-native word combinations. According to Lewis, NNSs make
frequent errors with collocations and when constructing complex phrases, often using language that is comprehensible but lacks “nativeness” because the correct collocation was not used. Additionally, Lewis goes on to assert that lack of collocational knowledge forces even the most advanced second language learners to slowly piece sentences together word by word, causing an otherwise competent NNS to come across as non-idiomatic.

Studies on the use of Collocations and Language Learning

Studies show that language learners do use formulaic language, but not to the extent that natives do, and then tend to rely on a small lexis of favorite phrases, especially phrases that are cognate to native language forms (Bartning, 1997; Dechert, 1984; Durrant & Schmitt, 2009; Granger, 1998; Trévise, 1986). This results in overuse of vague formulas such as “il y a des gens qui disent” (there are some people who say) when writing in French, even by the most advanced L2 speakers (Guillot, 2005). Another study showed that non-native writers rely greatly on high-frequency collocations and that they underuse less frequent, strongly associated collocations that carry more precise meaning to native speakers (Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). This finding provides a logical explanation why non-native language seems to lack idiomacy.

Additional investigation into formulaic language has shown that it is an area where L2 learners struggle to close the gap on native speakers (Kuiper, Columbus, & Scmitt, 2009). Other cross-sectional studies have shown that only very advanced learners, primarily those who have had a long-term immersion experience in the L2 community, display collocational knowledge resembling that of native speakers (Forsberg, 2010; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Nekrasova, 2009). Furthermore, longitudinal...
data shows that the development of a L2 learner’s collocation repertoire over the course of their language-learning instruction tends to be slow (Li & Schmitt, 2010; Qi & Ding, 2011).

Studies in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms have shown that explicit collocation teaching benefitted EFL students. In one study, students receiving instruction in collocations were perceived by judges to be more proficient (Boers, F., Eyckmans, J., Kappel, J., Stengers, H. & Demecheleer, M., 2006). In two separate studies of English majors at a Taiwanese university, results showed that explicit collocation instruction resulted in higher vocabulary scores, more active classroom participation and more L2 oral interaction among students (Hsu, 2002; Myers & Chang, 2009). Moreover, knowledge of collocations has been found to correlate strongly with proficiency ratings. Keshavarz and Salimi (2007) described a correlation of $r = .68$ between students’ performance on a collocations test and their scores on a test gauging general proficiency. Hsu and Chiu (2008) discovered a correlation of $r = .56$ between learners’ collocation test scores and their scores on a speaking proficiency test. Similarly, Dai and Ding (2010) reported significant correlations between the numbers of formulaic sequences used by L2 learners in their writing assignments and the scores they earned for these assignments from independent assessors.

Collocation Selection

The possibility that explicit collocation instruction could benefit second language learners leads logically to the question of how this instruction should be implemented in the classroom. Unfortunately, the gap between what is ideal to teach and the reality of
the classroom can be quite large. One of the biggest challenges, pedagogically speaking, to teaching collocations, is the selection of which phrases to use (Granger, 2011).

The dominant criterion in the collocation selection process is corpus-based frequency (Granger; Lewis 2002). Corpora make it possible to identify the common uses of words and how often they are used. Choosing high frequency words that are relevant to student interests and needs ensures that teaching time is not wasted on phrases that students will never encounter. Other factors to consider when selecting collocational phrases include complexity (learnability), familiarity (teachability), and learner variables such as age, aptitude, motivation and learning style (Granger).

Pedagogic Methods for L2 Collocation Acquisition

Diverse pedagogic methods have been suggested in recent years with a view to encouraging L2 collocation acquisition. Some methods suggest ways of helping students engage with and remember particular lexical phrases they encounter during classroom activities (Boers & Linstromberg, 2009; Davis & Krysiewska, 2012). Others, acknowledging that classroom time is typically too short to give explicit attention to more than a small number of lexical phrases, promote independent study outside of the classroom (McCarthy & O’Dell, 2005), or endorse using classroom time to raise students’ awareness of the importance of lexical phrases rather than trying to teach individual expressions (Lewis, 1997). This is reminiscent of the recommendation in L2 vocabulary learning, that after learners have learned the highest utility words, classroom activities should shift to equipping learners with strategies that may help them learn the rest of their L2 vocabulary independently (Nation, 2001). In a similar vein, some
researchers have explored the possibility of increasing incidental acquisition of lexical phrases by making selected lexical phrases standout in reading texts through glossing and repetition (Bishop, 2004; Peters, 2009, 2012; Webb, Newton & Chang, 2013).

These methods have all shown some successes at helping students to learn collocations. Unfortunately, none of them seems to work reliably and, although students do well on collocation tests, end-of-course essays do not usually contain any more formulaic sequences than those written by a control group (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). One possible explanation for lack of mastery is that taking notice of a phrase once or twice during a unit is not enough to leave memory traces. This has been found to be the situation in studies concerning the uptake of single words (Waring & Takaki, 2003). In addition, by the time a given word sequence is encountered a second and third time, so much time may have passed that any memory trace left by the previous encounter has faded away before it can be consolidated with the recent encounter.

Another method that has been proposed for stimulating learner uptake of collocations is flooding the input, or making certain that the same phrase recurs several times in a relatively short stretch of discourse. In a recent study of uptake from reading while listening, Webb, Newton and Chang (2014) incorporated 18 verb-noun collocations in a graded reader. The researchers created four versions of the reader, changing the number of times each of the collocations occurred. Intermediate level ESL learners were assigned to read one of the four versions as they simultaneously listened to a recording of it. The participants’ retention of the target collocations was measured by immediate post-tests. Not surprisingly, the more often a collocation was encountered,
the better the chance of it being recalled, with receptive knowledge tests showing better scores than productive knowledge tests. However, after as many as 15 encounters in a short amount of time, collocations were only recalled half of the time in the productive knowledge test.

The previously mentioned studies were all simulations of incidental learning. Woolard (2001), a practitioner of Lewis’ Lexical Approach, advocates using a noticing strategy during reading activities to encourage collocation awareness and acquisition. In his university level EFL classes, Woolard requires students to keep a vocabulary notebook where they record collocations they have noticed during reading time in class and on their own. At the beginning of a new semester, he models how to examine text to identify collocations that have utility for a language learner. He then shows students how to record the collocations in a notebook using the phrase, a definition in the L1, a definition in the L2 and an example sentence of how it is used. Student notebooks can be organized in any number of ways. He suggests alphabetically or by subject. He encourages students to share their discoveries and to use newly acquired collocational phrases frequently in reading and writing tasks.

Taking another approach, Webb and Kagimoto (2011) asked English as a second language (ESL) learners to deliberately learn sets of unknown adjective-noun collocations accompanied by the L1 translations. The study participants were given three minutes to study twelve collocations. The test scores were highest when the choice among collocates was limited by using the same adjective (deep respect, deep sleep, deep voice). In contrast, the collocations comprised of different words, including semantically
related adjectives (*narrow escape* and *slim chance*) generated the poorest post-test scores. This demonstrates that the presence of semantically related words in a set of expressions to be learned adds to the learning burden, a phenomenon commonly reported in relation to single words (Erten & Tekin, 2008; Finkbeiner & Nicol, 2003).

Lindstromberg and Boers (2008a, 2008b) investigated the potential mnemonic benefits of drawing learners’ attention to sound repetition commonly manifested in collocations, namely alliteration (*play a part*), rhyme (*wear and tear*) and assonance (*turn a blind eye to*). Study participants were asked to sort 26 two-word collocations into one alliterative and one non-alliterative set. An immediate free recall test showed that the alliterative collocations were recalled significantly better than the controls. A delayed recognition test administered two weeks later showed similar results. Additional studies in 2008 and 2012 replicated the results. Unlocking the mnemonic potential of sound patterns and stimulating learners’ engagement with those patterns appears to be a small but worthwhile expenditure of time. Moreover, there is strong statistical evidence that sound repetition plays a significant part in the bonding between words and the formation of lexical phrases (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Gries, 2011).

Another potential mnemonic aid is the imageability of some collocations, especially those that are more fixed and idiomatic. Steiner, Hulstijn and Steinel (2007) demonstrated that idioms that bring a mental picture to mind were better retained than idioms that do not. This finding supports the dual coding hypothesis (Paivio, 1986; Sadoski, 2005), which states that concrete vocabulary is easier to remember than abstract
vocabulary and with finding that concreteness is strongly associated with imageability (Hamilton & Rajaram, 2001).

Last of all, verbatim text memorization has been shown to help formulaic sequences become entrenched in memory. Wray (2004) described how a novice language learner managed to memorize enough L2 language in just one week to enable her to present a cooking program on television. In a larger study, Dai and Ding (2010) had one groups of ESL students memorize texts verbatim during daily study time during a school term. Another group used their study time to study English texts in whatever way they preferred. The former group’s use of collocations in end-of-term writing assignments was found to be more diverse and more accurate that the latter’s.

In short, there is a body of evidence that suggests that L2 learners have an “impoverished stock” (Wray, 2012) of collocational phrases in their repertoire. We also know that knowledge of collocations can improve native-likeness and fluency. If communication is the primary goal of second language learning, why then, do language teachers not look for more opportunities to include collocations as part of L2 input?

Niche

There are many factors that contribute to language proficiency. This chapter discussed the role that collocations play in achieving more native-like speech. It explained how knowledge of collocational phrases aids in comprehension tasks. This chapter also asserted that explicit teaching of collocations or phrases commonly used in the target language has shown promise as a way of improving student speech and writing, making it more native-like and comprehensible. Teaching collocations has been studied in adult
language learners and very small groups with a primary focus on English language learners. Through a thorough review of existing literature, I did not find studies on teaching French collocations to second language students in a high school classroom. My goal during this study was to determine whether teaching frequently used French collocations to high school French 2 students would give them useful vocabulary in order to help them to become more confident and able speakers and writers, and more skilled listeners and readers.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided an explanation of collocations, followed by an exploration of how studying collocations could benefit student learning. In particular, it examined the various definitions of collocations proposed by linguists and presented a definition of collocations from francophone linguists’ point of view. It concluded with a summary of pedagogic methods for collocation instruction.

In this study, I sought to discover if explicitly teaching collocations to high school French 2 students would generate better, more useful vocabulary acquisition. More particularly, I wanted to ascertain the degree to which learning collocations would help students to be more effective communicators in French. Questions to be answered were:

- With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing task?
- To what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

In Chapter Three, I outline my research methodology for this study. I describe the participants, data collection tools and protocols for this project.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to establish whether explicit instruction of collocations to high school French 2 students would improve their ability to comprehend and communicate in French. It was also intended to measure the students’ perception of the value of learning collocations during vocabulary instruction. The research was guided by the following questions: With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing task? To what will degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

This chapter describes the methodologies used in this study. It gives the rational for why certain methods were chosen, illustrates the procedure for conducting the study and outlines the data collection protocol.

Mixed Methods Research Paradigm

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which is an integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study. The combining of research methods is traditional in education research. In order to find relevant answers to the real-life questions that arise during classroom instruction, it is logical to collect data from as many resources as possible. Since classrooms are not laboratories, they cannot provide a strictly controlled environment. It is imperative,
therefore, that data be collected from multiple sources in order to accumulate enough information to achieve the most accurate results (Borge, 2012).

Mixed-methods is, therefore, an established research approach that aims to provide consistent and comprehensive answers to study research questions through the use of a variety of methods. Rossman and Wilson (1985) document this model as a reliable means to collect and triangulate data. The goal of mixed methods research is to examine an issue from different aspects and seek the best answers to research questions. By combining methods in a single project, it is possible to draw on the strength of all the methods used (Smeby, 2012). Using multiple sources leads to richer data, reveals contradictions in outcomes, and makes it possible for the researcher to be more confident in the results (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1985).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether explicitly teaching collocations in a high school French 2 class would help students acquire and use them, and would enable students to feel more confident in their language abilities overall. This classroom-based study was not intended to provide generalized conclusions about second language vocabulary instruction. The intent, rather, was to provide a small window into the practice of language instruction in a public high school and to inform other professionals about the possibility of using collocations as a way to be more effective teachers of vocabulary.

The qualitative data was collected from a survey administered at the conclusion of the study and from the researcher’s notes. The survey was designed to determine the students’ perceptions and attitudes about the successes and/or failures of collocation instruction. The notes were records of student responses to the collocation instruction
and the researcher’s perception of the success of failure of different teaching methods and practice activities.

The quantitative data was gathered from two sources, the collocation recognition pre-test and student writing samples, which were analyzed to determine the frequency of collocation use. Data gleaned from the writing samples compared with student background knowledge at the beginning of the study provided a measure of student collocation acquisition over the six-week study period.

Data Collection

Participants

The participants of this study were nineteen students in the researcher’s French 2 classes at an Upper Midwest, suburban high school. The classes met daily for 50 minutes and were comprised of 54 students in two classes, ages fifteen to nineteen, who had successfully completed French 1 the previous year. Students were given the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate in the study, with the understanding that, aside from the final summary and writing assessment, everyone, participant or not, would be learning the same material and doing the same activities.

In addition to taking a collocation recognition test at the onset of the study, all French 2 students were evaluated and ranked according to language proficiency. Student participant scores were consistent with the other students in the class and ranged from Novice-mid to Intermediate-Low, as determined by the ACTFL performance assessment guidelines, which is considered typical for level two students.
Survey Model

The survey, typically in the form of a questionnaire, is one of the most useful and commonly used methods of data collection on views and opinions of study participants (Mackey & Gass, 2013). Surveys are a form of self-assessment that allows researchers to gather data related to participants’ reaction to classroom instruction and provide information that is not typically acquired from production data on its own (Mackey & Gass). Other advantages to using surveys are that they are relatively easy to construct and administer. In addition, they can quickly elicit comparable information from study participants that provide qualitative insights and qualitative data (Mackey & Gass).

As with any data collection method, there can be problems with survey data. Many of those problems arise from the self-assessment format of surveys. Self-assessment of knowledge is a learner’s estimate of how much they know or have learned about a particular subject. Self-assessment forces learners to be consciously aware of the ways in which formal learning extends their capabilities (Little & Erickson, 2015). Factors that can impact the accuracy of self-assessment include peer and parental expectations, perceived teacher expectations, cultural mores, self-awareness and self-assessment skills (Ross, 1998; Sitzmann et al., 2010). Cognizance of these variables and their possible influence can allow researchers to make adjustments to improve the accuracy and interpretation of survey data (Sitzmann et al.).

In order to minimize the possible influence of poor self-assessment skills, students participating in the current study practiced using surveys to critique performance on assessments and homework assignments during the previous five months. To improve
student self-awareness, in addition to the practice surveys, learners were provided frequent feedback from the instructor on their performance in the course itself and on the specific task of learning collocations. Last of all, students took the self-assessment surveys anonymously in an effort to remove the perceived pressure to meet teacher expectations.

Writing Samples

Another phase of data collection involved evaluating students’ writing samples throughout the collocation learning process. Samples of student work from daily journal entries were checked periodically. A summative writing test was administered at the end of the study, and consisted of six drawings and a short prompt (Appendix A). The prompt instructed the students to write a short paragraph describing “Bosco’s” daily routine as depicted in the drawings. The writing samples were evaluated to determine how often the students chose to use collocational phrases in their description of the daily routine.

Procedure

Participants

The participants of this study were 19 high school French 2 students from two Midwest suburban communities. The student population at the school is diverse, with 78% minority enrollment, and 63% of the student body determined as economically disadvantaged. Nineteen learners from two classes, fifty-four students in total, participated in the study, twelve students from one class (44% of the class) and seven students from the other (26% of the class). Students were given the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate in the study, and informed that, aside from the final survey and writing
assessment, all French 2 students would be learning the same material and joining in the same activities. Student participants remained mixed with the rest of the class throughout the study, and worked with non-participant partners during practice activities.

Preparation

During the study, collocations describing daily routine were explicitly taught to French 2 students over the course of six weeks. The collocations were chosen for their relevance to the lesson theme (daily routine) and their frequency of use in common vernacular. Once identified, each phrase was crosschecked for accuracy and frequency using Le Robert’s *Dictionnaire des combinaisons des mots* (*Dictionary of Word Combinations*) (2009). The goal was to select a variety of collocations that would be highly applicable, relatively easy to learn and that would help students achieve their language learning goals. The selected phrases were embedded in regular weekly vocabulary instruction. At the commencement of the study, aside from a brief explanation that collocations are phrases composed of words that are frequently found together and they are helpful to know, students were given no specific explanations about why we were focusing on them or the potential benefits to expect from learning them.

Process

Prior to any new vocabulary instruction, all students were given a short recognition pre-test to determine their familiarity with the collocations we were about to study. Students were given a series of possible collocations about daily routine and asked to identify the phrases that commonly occur in French (Appendix B). Approximately
fifty percent of students failed to identify one or more phrases that had been presented in previous units. As a result, the list of collocations to be taught during this study was modified slightly to include pertinent word combinations from past units that students were still in the process of acquiring.

Next, students received note pages to be filled out as new words and phrases were introduced. Collocations were taught as part of regular vocabulary instruction during the course of four instructional sessions using power point presentations, role-play and realia. The new vocabulary was then reinforced through a variety of classroom activities using the four modalities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students were held accountable for learning the collocations by taking periodic vocabulary tests to demonstrate vocabulary mastery. These tests were short “recognize and recall” quizzes, created by the researcher, using Milton’s (2009) examples of effective vocabulary measurement as a template. Because the quizzes were used in the calculation of student grades, they could not used as a data source for the study. The quizzes did, however, provide guidance to the researcher and inform instruction.

Mid-unit, all students, participants and non-participants, were asked to create a slide show on Adobe Voice describing their usual morning routine. This was a summative activity that was used to calculate students’ mid-trimester grade and the findings cannot, therefore, be reported in the study. The results were used instead as another method for me, the researcher, to determine student progress in learning and using collocations. Based on the information gleaned from the activity, I concluded that the students were ready to move on to the second half of the unit.
At the end of the unit, participants in the study were asked to write a paragraph using picture prompts and the vocabulary from the unit (Appendix A). Students were informed that they could choose to write in either present or past tense, whichever they preferred. Aside from being asked to do their best, no other instructions were given. The following day, participants were asked to fill out a survey asking them about their experience studying and learning collocations (Appendix C). Results of the survey are reported in Chapter 4.

Table 1

*Study Timeline*

| Week 1 | Students take recognition pre-test.  
|        | First set of vocabulary taught to classes.  
|        | Practice and reinforcement activities begin. |
| Week 2 | Practice continues.  
|        | Noticing strategy introduced and practiced.  
|        | Second set of vocabulary taught to classes. |
| Week 3 | Students take recognition recall quiz  
|        | Students work on Adobe Voice project |
| Week 4 | Third set of vocabulary taught to classes.  
|        | Next set of practice and reinforcement activities begins. |
| Week 5 | Practice continues.  
|        | Last set of vocabulary taught to classes. |
| Week 6 | Practice continues.  
|        | Study participants take final writing test.  
|        | Study participants do self-assessment survey. |
Method

In Chapter Two, studies and approaches were presented that showed a variety of methods for collocation instruction. These studies included ways of helping students engage with and remember phrases (Boers & Linstromberg, 2009; Davis & Kryszewska, 2012), promoting independent study outside of class (McCarthy & O’Dell, 2005), glossing text to highlight phraseology (Bishop, 2004; Peters, 2009, 2012; Webb, Newton & Chang, 2013), and using class time to raise student awareness as opposed to explicit instruction (Lewis, 1997; Woolard, 2001). Based on research, I concluded that there were four primary interventions I could easily incorporate that might positively affect collocation learning. These were, 1) increasing the frequency of input, 2) encouraging students to work more diligently on memorization, 3) teaching students to be more aware of collocations during reading and listening comprehension practice, and 4) encouraging them to include lexical phrases as part of regular vocabulary study.

Based on these interventions, in addition to using my usual vocabulary learning procedures, I also introduced one new vocabulary-teaching method and two new reinforcement activities into my teaching practice for this study. The new method was a noticing strategy (Woolard), which was one of the steps in Lewis’s (2001) Observe, Hypothesize and Experiment Method. When employing this strategy to help students identify collocations during listening and reading comprehension exercises, I modeled different ways to find or notice collocations in examples of authentic language. Authentic language, as it pertains to teaching and learning French, refers to materials that were written by native French speakers for an audience of native French speakers. The primary objective
in selecting authentic language is to give students the opportunity to learn the language as it is actually written and spoken and to replace the artificially constructed text and listening samples that are commonly found in high school second language textbooks.

During the study, students were frequently given level-appropriate selections of carefully chosen authentic text that coincided with the current theme of study (see Appendix E for one example). Students started out working parallel with me as I modeled the strategy. Once I was comfortable with their ability to find collocations, they were asked to work on their own or with partners to identify additional collocations in the text. The identified collocations were then read aloud by students and listed on the chalkboard with their meaning. Once the list on the board was complete, students were asked to add them to their vocabulary note pages.

Practice and reinforcement

Typical in-class practice activities for vocabulary acquisition include partner games, teacher Q & A, topical classroom surveys, watching authentic language videos and listening to authentic music to identify target vocabulary as used by native speakers, and answering short writing prompts designed to require use of target vocabulary. In addition to these practice activities, I added a new, domino-styled activity (Appendix D) to enhance partner collocation practice. I made cards with half of one collocational phrase on one side and half of another phrase on the other side. Each half-phrase had a match on another card. Students played with the cards as if they were playing dominos.

A second new activity also helped students remember collocational noun/verb pairs. I gave each student half of a collocational phrase on a slip of paper. The students
circulated around the room until they found the student with the other half of the phrase. I made certain that there was only one possible collocate for each half-phrase, so students had to keep asking classmates until they found it. Students then took turns sharing their collocational phrases with the class.

Data Analysis

There were two primary results to measure in this study: student use of collocations in a writing exercise and student perception of the study of collocations as it relates to their language learning. The methods I used to collect data were writing samples that were collected at the end of the study, personal notes of student engagement and response to the instruction, and a survey given to the students at the end of the study.

At the end of the study, data from the recognition pre-test and post-study writing samples were displayed using bar graphs and using a scatter plot format. These figures showed the frequency of collocation recognition and use per student and the group as a whole. The data collected from the survey was sorted, displayed using bar graphs and analyzed for common themes and patterns.

Ethics

This study followed strict school district guidelines and employed several safeguards to protect participants. The school principal and the school district’s Director of Curriculum and Instruction agreed to the study and were kept apprised of results during the process. Students and parents were informed about the study, given personal copies of the study protocols and parameters, and required to sign and return permission
forms. And finally, the study was approved by Hamline University. To preserve anonymity during the study, students were assigned a code number to use when submitting survey answers and writing samples. Student grades were not affected by the study, and no changes were made to grading protocols. Additionally, the students themselves decided whether or not to participate in the study and were informed verbally and in writing that they could decline to be part of the study at any time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my research questions, the participants, the preparation for the study and methodology used in the study. I discussed why certain methods were chosen and how they were used. In Chapter Four, I will describe the results of my investigation and present the findings from my research.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place at public high school in the Midwest. The participants were nineteen high school French 2 students, ages fifteen to nineteen. Study participants were from two different classes, seven from one class of twenty-seven, and twelve from another class of twenty-seven. Students participating in the study resided in two suburban communities and represented a variety of ethnicities and family situations. Several students were already bilingual, speaking a first language at home and English at school. Students self-selected to participate in the study and remained in their original classroom situation with non-participants. With the exception of the final writing assessment and the self-assessment survey, all students in the class, study participants or non-participants, were taught the same material, at the same time, using the same methods. They were assessed uniformly as well.

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing assignment?
- To what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

I used qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods for this classroom study. I gathered data from a pre-assessment recognition quiz, a post-instructional
writing assignment, research notes, and student surveys. I also used additional formative assignments and quizzes during the instructional process to monitor the process of student language acquisition and to provide feedback for the students on their progress.

This chapter will impart the results of collocation study in high school French 2 classroom setting. The first section presents the quiz scores showing students’ prior knowledge of the collocations we were preparing to study. The second section shows the results of the post-study writing assignment. The following section discusses the research notes and the last section gives the results of the individual student self-assessment surveys.

Data

**Pre-assessment recognition quiz**

The study began with an assessment (Appendix A) of students’ prior knowledge of collocations relating to the theme of this unit: daily routines. Students in the participating French 2 classes took French 1 at one of three different junior high schools, or at the high school where they are currently enrolled, resulting in varied background knowledge, especially in vocabulary. I decided that prior to instruction, it was essential to determine which collocational phrases were already part of the students’ lexicon and which collocations would be completely new to them. I was also curious to find out if students had acquired any knowledge of collocations through independent study.

During the quiz, students were each presented with a series of phrases and were asked to select those phrases that are commonly used in French. All choices offered were
grammatical, but not all phrases were conventionalized and part of standard French vernacular. There were twenty-six valid or conventionalized collocational phrases and ten invalid collocational phrases embedded in the assessment. Some of the invalid phrases used false cognates such as the verb *passer*, to impede decoding. Because *passer* appears regularly in idiomatic collocations, students would have to know which collocations were conventionalized in French in order to recognize that the phrase containing the false cognate was invalid. Additionally, ten of the collocations in the assessment had been taught to students in previous units as single word units and not explicitly as collocational phrases.

Students took this quiz on their iPads. The program used to administer the quiz was Schoology, which is our regular classroom management software. Students regularly take Schoology generated quizzes in all their courses, so they are very familiar with the process. During the test, the software automatically shuffles the questions to discourage cheating, so although students all had the same collocational phrases to identify, they were presented in a different order for each student. One student on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) requested and was given a paper copy of the quiz.

Quiz scores showed that students’ ability to recognize conventional French collocations varied widely, with scores ranging from zero to sixteen out of the twenty-six valid French collocations presented as options. Eight students correctly identified thirteen to sixteen collocations, which was higher than anticipated, since, as far as I was aware, students had only learned vocabulary for ten collocations during previous units.
Previously untaught phrases that were correctly identified by twelve or more students included *se raser la figure* (to shave your face), *se brosser les cheveux* (to brush your hair), and *se lever* (to get up) + a time expression. Because students failed to select other expressions using *se raser* and *se brosser*, I believe that students correctly selected *se raser la figure* and *se brosser les cheveux* because they were able to quickly decode them. The verbs *raser* and *brosser* are cognates to the English words “razor” and “to brush”, and participants had learned the words *figure* and *cheveux* during a unit on appearance. I think that students correctly identified the *se lever* expressions for similar reasons. While *se lever* is not an English cognate per se, it does have the same etymology as the English words “lever” and “levitate”, possibly facilitating the decoding process. In addition, the time phrases *tôt*, *de bonne heure*, and *en retard* ought to be familiar to students at this level.

Students also failed to identify phrases that they should have known, including *ranger les affaires* (to put your things away), *faire la sieste* (to take a nap), *passer l’aspirateur* (to vacuum), and *passer un examen* (to take a test). These are words that students had learned in an earlier French 2 unit, and while they had not been taught explicitly as phrases, students had seen and heard them used together in that way multiple times. I was disappointed that they had not been retained in long-term memory. I can only surmise that students had not been given enough opportunities to practice and use them.

Figure 1 shows the number of correct answers out of twenty-six possible choices. Five out of nineteen students were unable to identify at least ten collocations. One
student was able to identify only four, and another was unable to identify any French collocational phrases.

![Bar chart showing number of correct answers on the collocation recognition pre-test.](image)

*Figure 1.* Number of correct answers on the collocation recognition pre-test.

**Classroom Instruction**

During the study, I kept notes on the activities we did in class; recording what we accomplished, how we went about it, whether or not the students enjoyed or found value in it, and how effective it was at practicing collocations. A summary of the information collected from those notes follows.

At the beginning of the unit, the classes were told that the new vocabulary list would include phrases in addition to single words. A few students complained about what they perceived as being more difficult, but most students were content to try something
new. Since the majority of my students had elected not to participate in the study, it was important for me to keep everyone invested in what we were learning. In order for me to be successful at keeping the students interested, we played favorite games like “slap it”, where each student, using their hand, tries to cover the picture card that represents the phrase I call out before their partner covers it. We also played a collocation version of vocabulary BINGO, where students wrote the nouns from the collocations in random order on a 5 X 5 grid. When I called out the verbs that collocate with those nouns, students covered the correct noun on their card until one or more students covered five in a row.

We did a “find someone who....” activity where students had a sheet of paper with twelve squares. Each square had a different activity and they had to find someone in the class who did that activity. For example, one square read, Trouve quelqu’un qui s’est mis(e) en robe ce matin (Find someone who put on a dress this morning).

We conducted single question and multiple question surveys about routines. On a multiple question survey, I usually give each student a different question to ask. For the study, I gave students questions using the collocations phrases we were learning. For example, one student asked, Est-ce que tu as pris une douche ce matin? (Did you take a shower this morning?). During the single question surveys, every student asked the same question and we analyzed the responses for trends. One question we used was, A quelle heure est-ce que tu te mets au lit? (What time do you go to bed?).

As the unit progressed, students used graphic organizers to begin writing about their personal daily routines. Students divided a blank paper into three columns; the left
column was labeled “l’activité”, and the middle column was labeled “l’heure”, and the right column was labeled “fréquence”. The class was instructed to make a list of the things they typically do during their morning routine in the left-hand column and then to put the approximate time they do each thing in the middle column. In the right-hand column they listed adverbs of frequency such as “quelque fois”, “tous les jours”, and “de temps en temps.” When they were finished, they wrote a paragraph using the notes they had made to help them stay organized.

These were all familiar activities and, with the exception of writing with graphic organizers, they were things that the students had previously enjoyed doing. This proved to be the case during this study as well.

During the second week, we started listening for target vocabulary in videos and sound clips. Generally speaking, students were excited that they were able to hear the phrases they had been learning in authentic contexts. One student commented that it was easier for him to pick out and understand a phrase than it was for him to single out an individual word. The class, by and large, agreed with his assertion.

Midway through the six-week unit, which also happened to be mid-trimester, I had the students take a short quiz on the vocabulary to make sure they were doing their part to learn the collocations. To check comprehension, students were asked to match twelve pictures depicting the new vocabulary to the collocational phrases that describe them. Ninety-two percent of the students scored an 80% or better on the quiz, indicating that students were getting enough practice and had learned enough to move forward. When comparing the results of this short mastery quiz to those on the pre-test, it was easy
to see progress. The best scores on the pre-test were 16 out of 26, or 61.5%, with a median score of 11 out of 26, or 42%.

Mid-trimester, I required them to do a summative project using Adobe Voice on their iPads. I asked all French 2 students to create a short slide presentation about their morning routine, set it to music, and record a voice-over describing it to me. Almost everyone, including myself, had an enjoyable time doing this project. Plus, we learned a lot about each other’s routines and habits. Most students applied themselves to creating a quality product, and at the end, they were very obviously pleased with the results of their hard work. I will definitely repeat this activity next year.

We also welcomed a visitor to our class on two occasions during the third week of the study. A student from a university in the region asked to come and observe my classroom. She was a native French speaker from Cameroon, and although we enjoyed having her there as an observer, several students wanted her to take a more active role. With a little coaxing, she was willing to participate in a couple of Question and Answer sessions, the results of which are reported later in this chapter.

During the second half of the unit, I used many of the same activities and games from the previous three weeks and added two additional practice activities. The first activity I added was a dominos-styled game where students worked in pairs to create a domino chain of collocational phrases (Appendix D). Each half of a domino contained one half of a collocational phrase. Students had to find a domino with the correct second half of the phrase in order to place it onto the board next to its partner. Most students enjoyed this, but there were a few that were overwhelmed and had difficulty
getting started. Once I came around and got them going, they were fine to continue on their own.

For the second activity, I gave each student half of a collocational phrase on a piece of paper and they had to circulate around the room, asking the other students what words they had until they the rest of the phrase was found. Once everyone located the rest of their phrase, student pairs took turns telling with phrase they had. I thought the students would enjoy this more than they did. There was general grumbling about having to get up and move around, followed by complaints that it was too difficult to complete the task and speak French. Eventually, with encouragement, everyone succeeded in finding their partner and sharing their collocational phrase with the class.

At the end of week four, I added a reading activity, based on Woolard’s (2002) noticing strategy (Appendix E). It was difficult for me to find authentic resource material on this topic to support reading comprehension. I eventually chose to use four different infographics. The posters were colorful with engaging artwork, and, in addition to their usual reading comprehension activities, students enjoyed working with partners to locate and record new collocational phrases that they identified.

Post-Instruction Writing Assignment

At the end of the study, participants were asked to write a paragraph describing the morning routine of a young man named Bosco, who was depicted in a series of pictures (Appendix A). Students were given few instructions aside from a request to use the vocabulary they had been studying in class. They were not instructed to use phrases or collocations, nor were they told how their writing samples would be assessed.
Participants were given as much time as they wanted to write their paragraphs, but most students finished in less than five minutes.

The post-instruction writing sample was evaluated to see how many collocations students employed when describing Bosco’s routine. During the six-week unit of study, students were explicitly taught and practiced thirty-three collocational phrases relating to daily routine and expressions of time. Using the noticing strategy (Woolard, 2000), students added as many as ten additional phrases to their notes. When writing the essay, there were twenty-one collocations that students had been explicitly taught that would be applicable to the picture prompts on the assessment. Based on the fact that there were six picture prompts, I felt that the use of six collocational phrases was a reasonable expectation for a French 2 student. A tally of how many collocations the students used correctly when writing their descriptive paragraph is shown below.

*Figure 2.* Number of collocations used in post-study descriptive writing.
Figure 2 indicates that the majority of students used five or more collocations in their writing samples. Three students used less than five. Nine students met or exceeded the anticipated count of six collocations per paragraph. The data in this table suggests that most students were able to recollect and use the collocations that they had learned and studied when writing a short descriptive paragraph. To further illustrate, an uncorrected writing sample from student #15 follows, with collocational phrases in italics. Note that he uses the verb s’habiller, which is part of the new vocabulary for this unit. However, although his usage is grammatically and semantically correct, s’est habillé is not a collocational phrase on its own. It requires a noun base such as un jean to be complete.

Bosco s’est réveillé à 6h30. Ensuite, il a prend une douche et s’est brossé les dents à 7 heures. Il s’est habillé puis a prend le petit-déjeuner. À 7h50 il quitte la maison pour travailler.

When comparing the data collected from the recognition pre-test and the descriptive writing post-test, a couple of interesting discoveries emerged. The first finding was that students did learn and use new collocations. The second observation showed that recognizing a collocational phrase and being able to use it to produce original language are different skills and one does not necessarily predict the other. The third finding showed that when students have been taught a collocational phrase in the target language to replace a phrase the students have created on their own using their first language as a template, they will continue to rely on the phrase that is more closely related to their own language, even though it is either incorrect or unconventionialized in
the target language. This is not surprising considering the wealth of research supporting this sort of finding (Bartning, 1997; Dechert, 1984; Durrant & Schmitt, 2009; Granger, 1998; Trévise, 1986).

Figure 3 shows collocations that were unrecognized before the study but frequently used in the student writing samples. I have included the collocation prendre *une douche* even though it was not represented on the pre-test because, based on observation, it was a new phrase for most students. Next, figure 4 shows collocations that were widely recognized on the pre-test and that could have been used on the post-test but were not. And lastly, figures 5 and 6 show two examples of students declining to use new collocations they had learned in favor of phrases that are more closely related to English.

![Figure 3. Previously unknown collocational phrases used in student writing samples.](image-url)
Figure 4. Collocational phrases that were recognized in the pre-test but not as frequently used as might be expected in student writing samples.

Figure 5. Use of the new collocational phrase s’en aller, versus a student generated phrase.
Figure 6. Use of the new collocational phrase *prendre le petit déjeuner*, versus a student generated phrase.

**Student Self-Assessment Surveys**

At the end of the study, after receiving vocabulary instruction, practicing and reinforcing target collocational phrases through a variety of activities, and working on identifying collocations during reading practice, participants were asked to complete a close-ended survey reflecting on their experience learning collocations. The survey was a self-assessment and asked students to rate eleven statements on a scale of zero to four:

- 0 = I completely disagree
- 1 = I somewhat disagree
- 2 = I have a neutral opinion
- 3 = I mostly agree
- 4 = I agree completely
Before starting the survey, study participants were asked to sit in a separate area of the classroom, away from nonparticipants, who were working on a reading assignment. After the survey was handed out, each statement was explained to students. Between each statement, opportunities were given for questions or clarification. One student became ill at the end of the study and was unable to complete a survey. Therefore, only results are reported for the remaining eighteen participants. I will discuss my interpretations of student responses in Chapter Five.

Figure 7 shows the students’ responses to the statement: *Learning word phrases is more difficult than learning vocabulary words alone.* The students’ answers show a diversity of opinions about the difficulty of learning collocations. Not everyone found it to be easy. One student agreed completely that collocations are more difficult to learn than words by themselves, and four students partially agreed with that statement. At the other end of the spectrum, only one student completely disagreed that learning collocations was more difficult. The majority of students were in the middle, with the largest number of students replying that they disagree somewhat with the statement that learning word phrases is more difficult. Since learning collocations was a new skill, it is possible that study participants who had difficulty needed additional support or more practice time in order to become accustomed to learning phrases instead of single word. This will be further discussed in Chapter Five.
Figure 7. Learning word phrases is more difficult than learning vocabulary words alone.

Figure 8 reveals the answers to the statement: Learning collocations associated with daily routines helps me to write better in French on that topic. The responses are heavily weighted towards the right side of the graph, with ten students indicating that they somewhat agree that learning collocations helped them be a better writer on that topic and six asserting that they completely agree. The students seem to believe that learning collocations had a positive impact on their writing.
Figure 8. Learning collocations associated with daily routines helps me to write better in French on that topic.

Figure 9 displays the answers to the statement: Knowing some common word combinations relating to my daily routine helps me feel more confident in my ability to express myself verbally in French on that topic. Once again, student responses are predominately positive with four students who completely agree, nine who somewhat agree and five who have no opinion. This indicates that having a collection of pre-learned phrases stored in memory helped students feel more confident in their ability to communicate verbally.
Figure 9. Knowing some common word combinations relating to my daily routine helps me feel more confident in my ability to express myself verbally in French on that topic.

Figure 10 shows the responses to the statement: Knowing collocations associate with daily routines helps me respond more quickly in conversations on that topic. Responses to this question were also generally positive. When listening to students during practice activities, it was evident that many students were able to express themselves more fluently with fewer pauses to think and formulate answers than otherwise typical.
Figure 10. Knowing collocations associated with daily routines helps me respond more quickly in conversations about that topic.

Figure 11 indicates the students’ responses to the statement: *Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines helps me understand more of what I read on that topic*. Responses to this question were also mostly positive, with “I mostly agree” being the median response. Three students replied neutrally and only one student replied that they somewhat disagreed with the statement.
Figure 11. Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines helps me understand more of what I read on that topic.

Figure 12 shows the answers to the statement: Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines has improved my listening comprehension on that topic. This chart shows that there were no negative responses and only three neutral responses. It appears from this that most students felt that knowing collocations was helpful during listening comprehension activities. These numbers were collaborated by my researcher’s notes, which indicated that students seemed delighted that they were able to comprehend the stories and, more specifically, to recognize many of the collocations they had been learning.
Figure 12. Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines has improved my listening comprehension on that topic.

Figure 13 displays students’ responses to the statement: *I think that collocations should be part of regular vocabulary study.* The data indicates that most of the students believe that collocations should be included as a part of regular vocabulary instruction. This is consistent with students’ previous responses to statements about the usefulness of knowing collocations.
Figure 13. I think that collocations should be part of regular vocabulary study.

Figure 14 discloses student responses to the statement: *Knowing some collocations helps me feel like my speech would be more acceptable to native speakers.* More students responded neutrally to this question than anticipated, although the median remained at “I mostly agree.” Early in the study, we briefly discussed collocations and how knowing them might help a French student speak and write more like a native French speaker. As I mentioned previously, during the third week of the study, a native speaker from Cameroon visited the French 2 classes on two occasions. I recorded in my notes that during question and answer sessions, thirteen students were able to ask comprehensible questions related to her daily routine. This was gratifying to witness because asking information questions is difficult for novice French students. Not surprisingly, however, most class-members were silent and watchful. Although interested, it may be that they lacked sufficient confidence to speak French with her.
Figure 14. Knowing some collocations helps me feel like my speech would be more acceptable to native speakers.

Figure 15 shows students’ responses to the statement: I would like to continue learning collocations in French class. Most students responded positively, that they would like to continue learning collocational phrases. Five students were neutral. It is possible that given additional time and support, those five students might have found the process more beneficial.
Figure 15. I would like to continue studying collocations in French class.

Figure 16 shows the answers to the statement: *Learning some collocations has helped me to identify other common word combinations in what I read.* When students learn a new literacy strategy, it is interesting to observe whether or not they use that strategy when they are working or reading on their own. During the study, we used Woolard’s noticing strategy (2001) to identify new collocations during our reading practice. Fourteen students indicated a favorable response to the statement regarding the usefulness of learning collocational phrases as an avenue to becoming more aware of and able to identify collocations in new contexts. This satisfactory response indicates the possibility that they found the noticing strategy useful.
Figure 16. Learning some collocations has helped me to identify other common word combinations in what I read.

Figure 17 depicts student responses to the statement: *Learning collocations as a part of my vocabulary study is a learning strategy I’ll continue to use on my own.* One student reported that they completely disagreed and four students gave neutral responses, but the remainder of the participants, thirteen students, seems positively inclined to continue learning collocations.
Learning collocations as part of my vocabulary study is a learning strategy I’ll continue to use on my own.

Researcher’s notes and observations

During the six weeks of instruction, I kept brief daily notes on how well students seemed to be mastering vocabulary and about which activities they seemed to like the most and appeared to be the most useful for reinforcement and practice. These notes provide additional insight into the effectiveness of the instruction and student attitudes about learning collocations. They will be referenced from time to time to corroborate data during the discussion of the student surveys.

Major Findings

The research questions guiding this study were: With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations? And, to what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in
French? First, after being taught previously unknown collocations and given the opportunity to practice and use them, students were able to incorporate them successfully to an acceptable degree in a descriptive writing activity of a morning routine. Another finding showed that recognizing a collocational phrase and being able to use it in a writing task are different skills, and mastery of one skill does not necessarily predict the mastery of the other. A third observation indicated that after students have been taught a new collocational phrase, they might not choose to use it. In its stead, they may prefer to employ a phrase that is less conventionalized in the target language, but is more similar to a like phrase in their first language. Additionally, it may be deduced from this study’s findings that student perception of the beneficial effects of learning collocational phrases such as greater range of expression, increased fluency, and improved reading and listening comprehension skills, are supported by results of this research.

The second research question was explored with a student self-assessment survey. The data collected and presented in this chapter indicate an overall positive response to learning collocations. The statements used to elicit responses can be grouped into three general categories: difficulty of acquisition, utility of knowledge, and continuation of instruction.

As shown in figure 7, students were fairly evenly divided on the question of perceived difficulty. This is the only statement that garnered responses that, when tallied, resulted in a median score of 2. This wide variance in responses shows that studying vocabulary in phrases as opposed to single words was more challenging for some learners than others. There are several possible reasons for this difference in opinion, including
the limited time of the study, the seeming difficulty of learning phrases over single words, and resistance to modifying established notions of how to learn vocabulary.

Students’ sentiments about the usefulness of learning collocations are shown in figures 8 through 12, figure 14 and figure 16. These charts show a generally positive attitude towards the utility of knowing collocations. During the study, students were given ample opportunities to see and hear the collocational phrases they were learning being used by native speakers, and were provided with several chances to practice using them when communicating in speech and writing. Research supports the concept that using collocations improves language learners’ language proficiency (Dai & Ding, 2010; Hsu, 2002; Keshavarz & Salimi, 2007; Myers & Chang, 2009). It is probable that study participants were able to detect the subtle improvement in their language abilities, which reinforced the perception that knowing collocations was useful.

Lastly, figures 13, 15 and 17 show responses to the statements pertaining to continued study of collocations. Most students recognized the benefit of knowing collocations and indicated a desire to continue studying them. When looking at the replies next to each other, the answers are not as consistent as the overall data would imply at first glance. Three students replied that they had a neutral opinion about whether or not collocations should be taught, but indicated that they mostly agreed that they would like to continue studying collocations and that learning collocations is a strategy they will continue to use. On the other hand, three students said that they mostly agreed that collocations should be a part of vocabulary study, completely agreed that they wanted to continue studying collocations, but had a neutral opinion about continuing to
learn collocations on their own. Figure 18 shows students’ replies to statements pertaining to continued study of collocations.

![Bar chart showing student replies to statements about continued study of collocations.]

- Collocations should be a part of regular vocabulary study.
- I would like to continue studying collocations.
- Learning collocations as part of my vocabulary study is a strategy I’ll continue to use.

**Figure 18.** Student replies to statements pertaining to continued study of collocations.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented the results of the study of explicit teaching of collocations to high school French 2 students. I reported data representing the students’ prior knowledge of collocations associated with daily routines, the number of collocations students typically used when writing a short paragraph on a typical daily routine and the results of a close-ended survey about the participants’ experience learning collocations. In Chapter Five, I will discuss my findings, reflect on their implications and pose suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study explored to what degree French 2 students could acquire and use French collocations and how the knowledge of these collocations might affect student confidence. The following questions guided the research:

- With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing task?
- To what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

This chapter will address the study’s major findings and its limitations. I will discuss possible implications for second language teachers and will offer suggestions for further inquiry and research.

Major Findings

To What Degree Will Students Be Able To Acquire And Use Collocations?

Over the six-week period of the study, student participants were able to learn and correctly use a number of collocational phrases. Data gathered from the post-writing assessment revealed that nine students met or exceeded the goal of using six collocational phrases when writing a short paragraph describing a typical morning routine. Seven students used five collocations, almost attaining the goal of six, and three students used
four or fewer collocations. These results suggest that most students were able to learn collocations about daily routines and then use them when writing a descriptive paragraph. Interestingly, for all but three students, there is a close correlation between the number of collocations students used in their writing sample and the number of collocations they recognized in the pre-test prior to the study. Figure 19 depicts this correspondence.

![Figure 19](image)

**Figure 19.** Student collocation recognition pre-test scores compared to student collocation use on descriptive writing post-test.

This pattern could signify a couple of different things. One possibility is that the scores reflect the level of language proficiency that each student had attained prior to the study. In an average world language classroom, student language proficiency varies from student to student and six weeks is too short for a typical student’s language proficiency to change in a measurable way. In this study, the higher scores could represent students with higher proficiency ratings and the lower numbers represent those who are still at a lower proficiency level. A second possibility is that some students simply came into the
study with more background knowledge than others, giving them an advantage that could not be made up by the other students in only six weeks.

However, looking at the scores from student #2, who did not correctly identify any collocations in the pre-test but was able to use five in the post-test; student #6, who identified fifteen collocations in the pretest but only used two in the writing assessment; and student #15 who could only recognize nine out of twenty-six collocations at the beginning of the study, but used seven when writing his description of Bosco’s morning routine; it may be premature to assert that strong students with high proficiency performed well overall and weak students with low proficiency did not. Data from students #2, #6 and #15 may also suggest that something else, other than prior knowledge, is at work in affecting the results of the writing assessment.

The explanation may be as simple as students having good days and bad days. The reason could also be more complicated. In the cases of students #2 and #15, I would like to believe that they truly learned the vocabulary well enough to successfully use collocations proficiently on the descriptive writing activity. However, it is also possible that these students were simply lucky because the collocations elicited by the writing prompts happened to be collocations that they had learned. In the case of student #6, the lack of collocation use on the writing assessment could indicate that most of the collocations he already recognized and those he learned during the study were still being stored in his memory as receptive vocabulary and had not yet become part of his productive vocabulary.
Will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence?

When examining student responses on the post-study survey, one major theme emerges: Students found that knowing collocations helped them communicate better in French. Student survey responses indicate that students think that learning collocations pertaining to daily routine helped them to better comprehend authentic listening and writing samples and to more fluently express themselves verbally and in writing on that subject. Researcher’s notes corroborated this perception. In addition, most study participants found that learning collocations was beneficial enough that they stated a desire to continue studying them in class. And finally, and perhaps even more interesting, the majority of students claimed that they would continue to learn and study collocations on their own.

The results of the survey support the usefulness of learning collocations in a second-year language class. When students learn vocabulary and then immediately use it in conversation and writing, it cements the newly acquired words and phrases into their memory so that they can be drawn upon again and again in conversation and writing tasks. Furthermore, learning collocations as opposed to individual words cuts down on processing time and cognitive load so that students can produce language more fluently (Boers et al., 2006; Durrant & Doherty 2010; Wray, 2002). According to MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément, an increase in ability to produce language leads to a parallel increase in student confidence (MacIntyre et al., 1997).

The student survey also revealed that a minority of students thought that it was more difficult to learn collocational phrases than it is to learn individual words.
Interestingly, students that felt this way did not necessarily perform poorly on the post-writing assessment. Therefore, there was not a direct correlation between perceived difficulty of the task and actual student performance.

So why did some students find learning collocations to be more difficult? It is not inconceivable that students who struggled learning collocations might have had an easier time if they had started learning collocational phrases in French 1 or earlier in French 2. Furthermore, it is plausible that a few students might have been intimidated by the size of the phrases, incorrectly believing that they would be more cognitively difficult to learn because more words were involved. An additional possibility could be that six weeks was not long enough for some students to adjust to learning phrases as opposed to single words.

Survey data also demonstrated that learning collocations helped students become aware of other commonly used word phrases. Fourteen of eighteen study participants responded positively to the statement, “Learning some collocations has helped me to identify other common word combinations in what I read,” potentially indicating that some students were using the noticing strategy on their own, which would be a fantastic outcome. The suggestion alone that students were actively looking for collocations when reading and listening in French underscores the assertion that students found knowledge of collocational phrases to be helpful and worthwhile.

Limitations

Time was the most obvious limitation of this study. The short time frame of six weeks limited the amount and frequency of data collection. During our practice, we
worked on all four modalities: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Ethically, during the study, I could not collect data from student work that was also being used to tally grades. Nor could I cease to grade and record student progress in the grade book for a period of six weeks. I strove, therefore, to strike a balance between data collected for the study and data collected to determine student grades. The result of this effort to maintain this balance meant that study data did not reflect the entire learning experience.

The time frame also limited the number of collocations that could be taught. A third, unexpected result of the study’s short time period was the difficulty a few students seemed to have adjusting to learning phrases as opposed to single words. Given more time to study, practice and reinforce vocabulary, it is possible that those students may have felt more comfortable and at ease with collocational phrases (Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin & van Heuven, 2011).

The small number of participants also limited the amount of data that could be reported in the study. The study group was purposefully limited to two French 2 classes, each with twenty-seven enrolled students. I allowed participants to self-select into the study and assumed that more students would elect to take part. Additionally, a number of students repeatedly forgot to return their permission slips and were unable to be part of the study. I also believe that the legal nature of the language in the permission form was an issue for some students whose parents are L2 English speakers and who, although capable of understanding the English they normally encounter on a daily basis, might be uncomfortable signing a form in a register that they may not have completely understood. Although none of the students in my French 2 classes require forms to be sent home in
their native language, there were certainly some situations where that might have been helpful in allaying parental concerns.

An unpredicted impediment to the success of the study was a general increase in student absenteeism during the last month of school. Students were frequently removed from class for special presentations, field trips and other school related activities. As a new teacher to this school, I was unable to foresee and plan for having so many students recurrently absent from class. Most students missed at least one day of instruction or practice during the last three weeks of the study. In order to complete the study, I had to make special arrangements for four participants to make up the final writing assessment and take the survey outside of normal class time. One student failed to take the survey and another student was dropped from the study due to poor attendance and an unwillingness to make up the writing post-assessment.

Lastly, having study participants mixed with non-participants is not an ideal research situation. However, in this setting, there was no suitable way to segregate the students. Also, I wanted every one of them to benefit from collocation instruction, not just the study participants. Based on my observations, nonparticipants did not distract participants during instruction or practice. In fact, some nonparticipants demonstrated more enthusiasm for studying collocations than the participants, which proved beneficial for keeping everyone on task. Finally, a couple of the participants expressed to me that they appreciated the anonymity of a mixed classroom setting so that they could participate without standing out.
Implications

This study supports the explicit teaching of collocations to high school French 2 students. Students participating in the study were able to learn collocational phrases commonly used to describe daily routines, and then recall and utilize them in a descriptive writing activity. In addition, students indicated on the post-study survey that they found knowing collocational phrases useful and worthwhile. They also specified in the survey that collocations should be part of regular vocabulary instruction. This evidence implies that teaching collocations to students, even at a novice level, is a worthwhile practice.

The results of this study also suggest that teaching collocations helps students feel more confident about their ability to communicate in a second language. It was exciting to witness the motivational boost that confidence gave to some students. Although the progression from confidence to motivation and then to success in not guaranteed, the potential positive outcome is worth continued exploration and effort. Admittedly, it does require extra time and research to find and select appropriate collocational phrases to compliment vocabulary in thematic units. And, realistically, not every thematic unit will be perfectly suitable for teaching collocations. However, systematically teaching collocational phrases in addition to single-word vocabulary has enough potential to improve student language proficiency and confidence (MacIntyre et al., 1997) that these inconveniences seem minor by comparison.

Study results also suggest that language students can benefit from learning collocations early in the language acquisition process. Whereas the majority of previous
studies focused on advanced language learners (Bishop, 2004; Dai & Ding, 2010; Durrant & Schmitt, 2009; Erten & Tekin, 2008, Kesharartz & Salimi, 2007; Kim, 2011; Hsu, 2002; Hsu & Chiu, 2008; Li & Schmitt, 2010; Martinez & Murphy, 2011; Myers & Chang, 2009; Nekrasova, 2009; Peters, 2012; Qi & Ding, 2011; Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin & Schmitt, 2011; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2014; Tremblay et al., 2011; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2011), this study was aimed at researching the effects of collocation instruction to French 2 students whose proficiency level is typically novice-mid to intermediate-low. Successful results on a post-study descriptive writing activity and positive survey results indicate that collocation instruction can be effective at beginning levels as well.

The results of this research will impact my teaching going forward. My immediate goal is to make collocational phrases a focal point in vocabulary instruction in all levels of French. This requires a commitment on my part to critically reviewing curriculum, reflecting on desired instructional outcomes and learner needs, determining which collocational phrases would be most beneficial for students to know and fit most logically into thematic units of study, and then, finally, adapting existing teaching materials to reflect this paradigm shift.

I also believe that my success at introducing collocational phrases to French 2 students will encourage second language teaching colleagues at my school and in my school district to incorporate collocations into their vocabulary instruction. Additionally, my research proposal piqued the interest of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for my school district, and I have been invited to present the results of my research to
curriculum specialists at the Educational Service Center. I am thrilled at the opportunity to participate in the discussion about best practices in vocabulary instruction in a more visible way than I would normally be able to and I hope to have the opportunity to present a workshop to share what I have learned with other World Language and ESL teachers in my district.

On a broader scale, I believe that language teachers need to be made aware of collocational phrases and how they can benefit students. Prior to conducting research for this study, with the exception of common social niceties such as “my name is…” and “thank you very much,” during my thirty years studying and teaching French and ESL, I had never been introduced to the notion of explicitly teaching students phrases as opposed to single word vocabulary units. And I am not alone; none of my colleagues knew anything about collocations either. In my opinion, collocational phrases ought to become an area of focus for seminars such as those presented at ACTFL, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages) and other conferences targeted at classroom teachers, not a topic researched and discussed solely by linguists and published in academic journals.

To summarize, explicitly teaching collocations to French 2 students opened my mind to new ways of thinking about vocabulary instruction and proved successful enough in practice that it will change how I instruct vocabulary from now on. Beginning this coming school year, I will rearrange my lesson plans to provide time for teaching collocational phrases to students beginning at the earliest levels. I will also share the
results of my research with my colleagues and encourage them to incorporate collocations into their classroom vocabulary instruction.

Further Research

I believe that there are many areas of collocation instruction to high school language learners that remain to be researched. My study lasted six, relatively short weeks. During that time, students did well acquiring and using collocations, but I would be interested in investigating the impact of collocation instruction over a longer period, using a wider array of vocabulary.

Further research could also be conducted in a more tightly controlled environment. Students in this study remained in their original class assignments, so study participants ended up being in mixed classes containing non-participants. Although I did everything in my power to ensure that non-participants did not affect the outcome of the study, there is always the possibility that the results would be different in a more controlled setting. Additionally, research in an environment where all data could be collected and analyzed would also be preferable. As mentioned earlier, due to the necessity of using some student work to tally grades, not all available data was eligible to be evaluated for the study, resulting in missed opportunities for additional findings.

Another aspect of collocation instruction to be explored would be to gather more input by working with a larger cohort. With only nineteen students from which to collect data, the conclusions established in this study are tentative. A larger study base is necessary to achieve optimal results and more reliably quantifiable data.
In addition to a larger study base, another necessity for achieving more reliably quantifiable data would be to include more instruments for data collection. Although measuring students’ ability to use collocations in a descriptive writing activity did provide some insight into how well students learned the target vocabulary, it was unable to measure how many new collocations students actually learned. This study could have benefitted from a post collocation recognition quiz, which could have provided a more definite understanding of which collocations actually became part of students’ receptive vocabulary.

An area of interest for future study could be the effect of learning collocations on listening and reading comprehension and on oral language production. Previous studies (Hsu & Chiu, 2008; Martinez & Murphy, 2011; Tremblay, Derwing, Libben & Westbury, 2011) demonstrate a possible connection between learning collocational phrases and improved reading comprehension and speaking ability. These studies, however, were focused on adult learners outside of a regular classroom setting. It would be interesting to discover if results could be replicated in a secondary school classroom environment.

A second area of interest might be the incorporation of mnemonic aids such as imaging and drawing attention to sound repetition during collocation instruction. Concrete vocabulary is easier to remember than abstract vocabulary and concreteness is strongly associated with imageability (Hamilton & Rajaram, 2001; Sadoski, 2005). Plus, there is strong statistical evidence that sound repetition plays a significant role in the bonding between words and the formation of phrases (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Gries, 2011).
In summary, although collocations have been and continue to be thoroughly studied in linguistics, explicit teaching of collocations in a world language classroom continues to be a new concept for most teachers. There are many areas yet to be explored, including longer studies in more controlled environments, studies involving larger groups of learners, studies focusing on different modalities and studies incorporating different types of teaching aids.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the major findings from this research, the limitations of the study, and some implications for me as a French teacher and for second language educators in general. I also suggested areas for further research. I will conclude by going back to the questions that guided this study.

- With explicit instruction, to what degree will students be able to acquire and use collocations in a descriptive writing task?
- To what degree will knowledge of collocations affect student confidence in their ability to communicate in French?

In this study, I have shown that, with explicit instruction, French 2 students are able to acquire and adequately use collocations in a descriptive writing task. I have also shown that most students who participated in the study feel that learning collocations helped them be better communicators in French, increasing their confidence in their abilities overall.

So, are my French 2 students still struggling to express themselves? Yes, of course they are. But there is a positive difference in how they look and sound since they
have begun learning collocations. I am hopeful that with sustained collocation instruction and practice, my students will continue to grow in confidence and language proficiency. There will still be times when they experience “a loss for words”, but those times will hopefully become rare occurrences as they move forward in their study of French language and culture.
APPENDIX A
Intérro: La matinée de Bosco

These pictures depict a typical morning for Bosco. Use them as prompts to write a paragraph about his routine. Write in present or past tense using the vocabulary we have been learning this chapter.
For each group of infinitive phrases, choose the ones that use correct French phraseology, or, in other words, choose the words that go together. There is more than one accurate answer in each grouping. The correct answers are always grammatically correct. If you aren’t sure, read each phrase quietly to yourself and choose the phrases that “sound” right to you.

1. a. prendre un examen
   b. prendre le bus
   c. prendre le petit-déjeuner

2. a. se porter une robe
   b. s’habiller en robe
   c. se mettre en robe

3. a. raser la figure
   b. raser les jambs
   c. se raser la figure
   d. se raser les jambs

4. a. se brosser les dents
   b. se brosser les cheveux
   c. se brosser les lèvres
   d. se brosser les yeux

5. a. se lever de bonne heure
   b. se lever tôt
c. se lever vers huit heures

d. se lever en retard

6. a. ranger ma chambre
   b. ranger mon frère
   c. ranger mes cheveux
   d. ranger mes affaires

7. a. se brosser les dents
   b. se brosser la figure
   c. se brosser les cheveux
   d. se brosser les jambes

8. a. faire les devoirs
   b. faire sa toilette
   c. faire la sieste

9. a. passer l’aspirateur
   b. passer le weekend
   c. passer un examen de français
   d. passer un cours de français

10. a. se laver les cheveux
   b. brosser le chien
   c. laver le chien
   d. se brosser les cheveux
APPENDIX C
Collocations survey

We have been learning collocations as part of our vocabulary study. I would like to know if they are helping you improve your French. Mark your reactions to each statement using a scale of 0-4, with

0. = I completely disagree
1. = I somewhat disagree
2. = I’m have a neutral opinion
3. = I mostly agree
4. = I agree completely

0-4

1. Learning word phrases is more difficult than learning vocabulary words alone.

2. Learning collocations associated with daily routines helps me to write better in French on that topic.

3. Knowing some common word combinations relating to my daily routine helps me feel more confident in my ability to express myself verbally In French on that topic.

4. Knowing collocations associated with daily routines helps me respond more quickly in conversations about that topic.

5. Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines helps me understand more of what I read on that topic.
6. Knowing some collocations associated with daily routines has improved my
  listening comprehension on that topic.

7. I think collocations should be part of regular vocabulary instruction.

8. Knowing some collocations helps me feel like my speech would be more
  acceptable to native speakers.

9. I would like to continue studying collocations in French class.

10. Learning some collocations has helped me to identify other common word
    combinations in what I read.

11. Learning collocations as a part of my vocabulary study is a learning strategy I’ll
    continue to use on my own.
<table>
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<th>Commencez</th>
<th>Mets-toi</th>
<th>en pyjama</th>
<th>Laves-toi</th>
<th>la visage</th>
<th>Brosse-toi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>les dents</td>
<td>Fais ta toilette</td>
<td>Prends</td>
<td>un bain</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tes affaires</td>
<td>Couches-toi</td>
<td>de bonne heure</td>
<td>Peigne-toi</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>les yeux</td>
<td>Occupes-toi</td>
<td>des enfants</td>
<td>Allume</td>
<td>les lumières</td>
<td>Débarrasse</td>
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<tr>
<td>la table</td>
<td>Passe</td>
<td>l’aspirateur</td>
<td>Regarde</td>
<td>la télévision</td>
<td>Rentre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la maison</td>
<td>Joue</td>
<td>au base-ball</td>
<td>Coupe</td>
<td>les légumes</td>
<td>Bats</td>
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<tr>
<td>les œufs</td>
<td>Envoie</td>
<td>les invitations</td>
<td>Lis</td>
<td>une histoire</td>
<td>Emballe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le cadeau</td>
<td>Ecoute</td>
<td>la musique</td>
<td>Ferme</td>
<td>la porte</td>
<td>ARRÊT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading comprehension: Comment se laver les mains

Key word recognition

Find the French word in the article that best expresses the following English words or phrases:

1. wet your hands
2. pour some soap
3. palm of your hand
4. rub your hands together
5. a hand wipe
6. single use
7. turn off the water

Identifying Collocations

How many new collocational phrases can you identify in this infographic? List them below. If you need help, look at the key words.

________________________________________

________________________________________

Purpose/Main idea

What is the purpose or main idea of this infographic?

________________________________________

________________________________________

Supporting details: Right there

Put an “X” next to the details that appear in the article.
1. You should rub your hands together for 15-20 minutes.
2. You should clean the area between your fingers.
3. You should wash under your finger nails.
4. Let your hands air dry.
5. Wipe the faucet off with the used hand wipe.
6. Throw the paper towel away.

Supporting details: Think and search.

Check the statements which are reasonable inferences and conclusions based on the infographic.

1. You should wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Washing your hands thoroughly is more important than wasting water.
3. Hand washing prevents the spread of germs.
4. Parents should teach their children how to wash their hands.
5. It is important to know the proper method for washing hands.

Grammar:

List the reflexive verbs you find in the infographic.

1. 3.
2. 4.

Collaborative summary:

With a group or partner, decide on the most important points found in the infographic.
Mouillez-vous les mains avec de l’eau

Versez du savon dans le creux de votre main

Frottez-vous les mains de 15 à 20 secondes : les doigts, les paumes, le dessus des mains et les poignets

Entrelacez vos mains pour nettoyer la zone entre les doigts

Nettoyez également les ongles

Rincez-vous les mains sous l’eau

Séchez-vous les mains si possible avec un essuie-main à usage unique

Fermez le robinet avec l’essuie-main puis jetez-le dans une poubelle
REFERENCES


