Influence of awareness–raising instructional method on the acquisition of formulaic sequences by learners of Chinese as a second language

Abstract

Formulaic sequences are ubiquitous in languages, and they play a very important role in both first language acquisition and Second language acquisition. However, many studies have shown that they are an area of great difficulty for language learners. A big gap still exists between native speakers and second language learners in understanding and using of formulaic sequences even for advanced learners. Learners’ L1 and L2 language proficiency, the frequency and semantic transparency of the formulaic sequences all make them difficult to learn. So, explicit teaching is necessary in the language classroom especially in the early stage of teaching Chinese as a L2.

It has been found that direct teaching of formulaic sequences is very effective, but class time is very limited. Lewis (1993) have therefore recommended devoting class time to activities that raise the learners’ awareness of formulaic sequences rather than spending time on the teaching of particular sequences. Some studies have shown that raising awareness of formulaic sequences in the classroom could be beneficial especially to learners’ fluency, accuracy and complexity, and improve their language proficiency. However, whether raising awareness of formulaic sequences in classroom could facilitate the acquisition of formulaic sequences is still not clear. Among the few studies on L2 learners’ knowledge and use of formulaic sequences, the majority focused on the English learners with Indo-European L1 backgrounds, and the research on the learners of non-Indo-European L1 backgrounds is scarce. What’s more, there is no study of focused instruction of formulaic sequences with Chinese as L2. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the role of awareness-raising instructional
methods in the acquisition of formulaic sequences, as well as the influence of semantic transparency on formulaic sequences acquisition.

Forty-four intermediate Chinese L2 learners were randomly divided into two groups. The experimental group (n=22) was instructed to raise learners’ awareness of formulaic sequences by underlining the formulaic sequences in the text, while the control group (n=22) did not receive this training. Two recognition tests and one recall test were administered to measure the receptive and productive knowledge of formulaic sequence. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the recognition and recall measurements in the immediate and delayed posttest, indicating that raising learners’ awareness of formulaic sequences had a significant effect on the learning and retention of formulaic sequences. In addition, the semantic transparency impacted Chinese L2 learners’ acquisition of formulaic sequences, yet its influence varied on the immediate and delayed posttest.

References


