

Effectiveness of ‘Focus on Form’ versus ‘Focus on Forms’ Instruction on the Development of Knowledge of Formulaic Sequences

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Abstract

Formulaic sequences are known to be fundamental to the way language is used, processed, and acquired in both the first language and the second language (Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Wray, 2002; Wray, 2008; Meunier & Granger, 2008; Schmitt, 2010) and consequently should be incorporated into foreign language classroom practice (Wood, 2010; Alali & Schmitt, 2012; Hatami, 2015). However, there have always been discrepancies over the best method of incorporating them into foreign language classroom. To this end, the current study compared the effectiveness of two form-focused methods of instructing formulaic sequences including ‘focus on form’ method and ‘focus on forms’ method on the immediate and sustainable development of knowledge of formulaic sequences. The participants of the study were thirty learners of English as a foreign language at the intensive English program of a university in Japan. The study followed an experimental design by dividing participants into two parallel groups of ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’, administering pre-test one week prior to intervention, conducting instruction for the two different groups at two different levels of explicitness for four weeks, and administering post-test and follow-up test respectively one week and ten weeks following the intervention. The instruments used for data collection consisted of instruction materials for intervention as well as three sets of recognition tests and cued output tests to assess participants’ learning gains as pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. The results of mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance revealed that both ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ methods of instructing formulaic sequences are equally effective for immediate and long-term goals. The pedagogical implications of the findings suggested the incorporation of target language formulaic sequences into foreign language instruction.

Keywords: Focus on Form Instruction, Focus on Forms Instruction, Formulaic Sequences

1. Introduction

A formulaic sequence, defined as “a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar” (Wray, 2002: 9), is a key component of language and is fundamental to the way language is used, processed, and acquired in both the first language and the second language (Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Wray, 2002; Wray, 2008; Meunier & Granger, 2008; Schmitt, 2010). There are four reasons why formulaic sequences are essential in language use: formulaic sequences are widespread in language use and a large amount of discourse is made up of different kinds of these sequences, meanings and functions are often realized by formulaic sequences because there is typically conventionalized language (referred to as formulaic sequences) available for every recurrent communicative need to realize this need, formulaic sequences have processing advantages which promote efficient and effective communication, and formulaic sequences can improve the overall impression of language learners’ language production judging them as more proficient when they use formulaic sequences (Alali & Schmitt, 2012).

Conscious of their importance in language learners’ language use, several scholars argue that formulaic sequences should be incorporated into language classroom practice (Wood, 2010; Alali & Schmitt, 2012; Hatami, 2015). There are generally two main instruction methods, referred to as form-focused instruction methods, to incorporate target language forms into foreign language classrooms: ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’. ‘Focus on forms’ instruction method causes language learners more or less autonomously to focus on the target language form in the midst of communication. This procedure is in contrast with ‘focus on form’ instruction method which causes language learners to focus on selected target language forms under explicit teacher direction. Because ‘focus on form’ is thought to occur in the context of meaning-focused language use, procedures intended to induce ‘focus on form’ avoid overt targeting of specific target language forms either by teachers or by materials writers. In contrast, ‘focus on forms’ procedures target particular target language forms largely in isolation from meaningful context (Lindstromberg et al., 2016).

With regard to adopting the best method to teach formulaic sequences, there are disagreements among scholars. While some scholars believe that using ‘focus on forms’ method is the best way (e.g., Cortes, 2004; Jones & Haywood, 2004; Ellis et al., 2008; Wood, 2009; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009), some other scholars advocate ‘focus on form’ method (e.g., Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Peters, 2012; Peters, 2014; Webb et al.,

2013; Lindstromberg & Eyckmans, 2014). According to advocates of ‘focus on forms’ method, formulaic sequences should be explicitly taught because, despite their frequency in various contexts, they seem to be complex in nature (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Cortes, 2004; Jones & Haywood, 2004). In other words, formulaic sequences may be either entirely transparent and, hence, pass unnoticed by language learners, or highly opaque and thus evoke a kind of mental burden on the part of language learners who will, in turn, try to disregard them in context (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009). More importantly, through focused instruction, language learners will probably get the chance to rehearse and internalize this language phenomenon and ultimately utilize it in their language production (Wood, 2009). Accordingly, focused instruction of formulaic sequences is likely to elevate their saliency, raise language learners' awareness of their different discourse functions in various contexts, promote language learners' ability to accurately implement them in their language production, and augment language learners' implicit knowledge of the target language (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Wood, 2009). On the other hand, advocates of ‘focus on form’ method claim that classroom time is clearly too limited to explicitly teach more than a fraction of the vast number of formulaic word strings in a language. Therefore, they recommend devoting class time to activities that raise language learners' awareness of the ubiquity of formulaic language rather than spending time on the direct teaching of particular sequences. In this view, it is hoped that an enhanced awareness of formulaicity will foster independent learning because language learners will be more inclined to notice formulaic sequences in the samples of foreign language they engage with outside the language classroom. This can be achieved by manipulating the input so that selected formulaic sequences are typographically enhanced such as highlighting and underlining. Another means that has been proposed for stimulating independent language learner uptake of formulaic sequences is flooding the input, or ensuring that the same sequence recurs several times in a relatively short stretch of discourse (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012).

To assess the effectiveness of form-focused instruction methods including ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ methods of instruction in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences, a number of studies have been conducted by the scholars in the field. In one of these studies, Boers et al. (2006) explored whether mastery of formulaic sequences can help language learners acquire a considerable range of target language expressions and come across as fluent and accurate target language speakers or not. Participants in their study were 32 English major students at a college for translation and interpreting in Belgium. At the beginning of the semester, participants had been divided into two groups that would be taking the same English courses. One of the groups (17 language learners) was randomly assigned to the experimental condition while the other group (15 language learners) was assigned to the control condition. Both groups of language learners were exposed to the same authentic language input and their course materials were identical, the only difference being the varying emphasis given to the significance of phrase-noticing. In the experimental condition, language learners' attention was directed to formulaic sequences, encouraging them to appreciate the syntagmatic dimension of vocabulary. In the control condition, the authentic language was used to exemplify grammar patterns and to draw language learners' attention to vocabulary at a paradigmatic level. At the end of semester, all language learners in both groups were interviewed taking into account range of expressions as well as fluency and accuracy of formulaic sequences used. The use of formulaic sequences was shown to be especially beneficial to perceptions of language learners' fluency and range of expression, but not accuracy. The findings revealed that although explicit teaching of formulaic sequences using ‘focus on forms’ technique can increase knowledge of target language formulaic sequences, the obtained knowledge cannot be accurately put into practice.

In a similar vein, Peters and Pauwels (2015) investigated whether vocabulary-focused instruction, in which the formulaic sequences are the explicit focus of teaching, has the potential to boost language learners' awareness and use of academic formulaic sequences or not. The participants in this study were 29 Dutch-speaking learners of English as a foreign language at a Flemish, Dutch-medium university in Belgium. The treatment was organized in three consecutive weeks. The learning materials consisted of two types of activities: recognition activities and cued output activities. The activities were designed according to the principle of ‘focus on forms’ vocabulary instruction or explicit vocabulary learning. Three types of tests at different levels of sensitivity were developed: a recognition test, a cued output test, and a writing test. The three tests were used as pre-test and post-test. Finally, language learners' end-of-year assignments were also analyzed in terms of the number of formulaic sequences used. The study consisted of five sessions. In the first week, language learners took the pre-tests. In the second, third, and fourth weeks of the semester, language learners engaged in vocabulary-focused activities on formulaic sequences. In the fifth week, language learners were administered the same tests as in week one without any warning. In week eleven of the semester, language learners had to submit their collaborative research paper. The findings revealed that a vocabulary-focused approach to academic formulaic sequences indeed results in significant learning gains at the level of recognition, cued output, and spontaneous use of academic formulaic sequences. Moreover, language learners were able to transfer their increased level of awareness and accurate (cued) output to their end-of-year assignment. The findings of this study suggested that explicit, vocabulary-focused instruction of academic formulaic sequences has the potential

to boost language learners' awareness, cued output, and spontaneous use of formulaic sequences.

The studies conducted by Boers et al. (2006) and Peters and Pauwels (2015) explored only the effectiveness of 'focus on forms' method of instructing formulaic sequences. To assess the effectiveness of 'focus on form' method in developing knowledge of target language formulaic sequences and to compare its effects with 'focus on forms' method of instruction, Rafieyan et al. (2014) conducted a study on 45 undergraduate learners of English as a foreign language at a university in Iran to compare the effect of 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction on determining the ideal method of acquiring a particular subgroup of formulaic sequences referred to as conventional expressions. The study followed an experimental design by assigning language learners to three groups including two experimental groups and one control group, conducting 8 intervention sessions, and administering a 32-item discourse completion task to assess their knowledge of formulaic sequences. Language learners in one of the experimental groups were taught target language formulaic sequences based on 'focus on form' method through watching videos and reading texts flooded with target language formulaic sequences. Language learners in the other experimental group were taught based on 'focus on forms' method through metapragmatic explanations of target language formulaic sequences followed by role plays. Language learners in the control group were merely taught the grammatical features of the target language. The comparison of language learners' performance in different instruction groups on the discourse completion task revealed that both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction were equally effective in developing language learners' knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. The findings obtained from the study showed that there are merits in both instruction methods and language instructors can opt to use either of them or both in language classrooms.

Although the findings obtained by Rafieyan et al. (2014) showed effectiveness of both form-focused instruction methods, the experiment conducted by Peters (2012) to compare the effectiveness of 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instructing formulaic sequences brought up different results. In the study, Peters (2012) explored the effect of two instructional interventions, directing language learners to pay explicit attention to unfamiliar formulaic sequences in a reading text (instructional method) and prompting language learners to allocate attentional resources to unfamiliar individual target words and formulaic sequences in a reading text by using bold typeface and underlining the target items (typographic salience), on language learners' form recall of both single words and formulaic sequences. Twenty-eight first-year students of applied language studies at a Flemish institution of higher education took part in the study. The target items consisted of 12 single words (six in bold typeface/underlined and six not in bold typeface/not underlined) and 12 formulaic sequences (six in bold typeface/underlined and six not in bold typeface/not underlined). Language learners' form recall of the 24 target items was measured via an immediate and delayed post-test, in which they had to supply the German translation of as many items as possible. The findings showed that merely encouraging language learners to focus their attention on formulaic sequences when reading a text has no effect on their recall. Rather when language learners read a glossed text, they are more likely to recall form of typographic salient items (bold typeface and underlined) than of lexical items that are not typographically salient. These findings revealed the superiority of 'focus on form' method over 'focus on forms' method in developing language learners' knowledge of target language formulaic sequences.

The review of studies conducted over the effectiveness of form-focused instruction methods on the development of knowledge of formulaic sequences shows that although the majority of studies proved the effectiveness of form-focused instruction methods in general, there have been discrepancies in the findings: some studies found the effectiveness of 'focus on forms' instructional method (e.g. Peters & Pauwels, 2015), some studies found 'focus on form' method of instruction more effective (e.g. Peters, 2012), while some other studies found both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction equally effective (e.g. Rafieyan et al., 2014). Furthermore, some of the studies merely measured one method of instruction (e.g. Boers et al., 2006; Peters & Pauwels, 2015), leaving the effectiveness of the other method in question. This calls for more studies comparing the effect of both 'focus on form' method of drawing language learners' attention to target language formulaic sequences through indirect techniques and 'focus on forms' method of explicitly teaching target language formulaic sequences on the development of knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. In this respect, the current study investigates the effectiveness of 'focus on form' as compared to 'focus on forms' methods of instructing formulaic sequences on acquisition of knowledge of formulaic sequences and sustainability of the obtained knowledge. Therefore, the research questions to be addressed in the study are:

Is form-focused instruction effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences?

Are 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction equally effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences?

Can 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction equally lead to the retention of knowledge of formulaic sequences?

Accordingly the null hypotheses are:

Form-focused instruction is not effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences.

'Focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction are not equally effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences.

'Focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction cannot equally lead to the retention of knowledge of formulaic sequences.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Participants of study were 30 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language at the intensive English program of International College of Liberal Arts, Yamanashi Gakuin University. The intensive English program of International College of Liberal Arts provides an immersive environment for language learners to develop language proficiency within a short period of time through intensive instruction of four main language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) by native and native-like level language teachers, providing a language acquisition center with numerous language learning resources and experienced language advisors for out of class support, and providing the opportunity to live and study with international students. At the time of data collection, participants had gone through the program for a period of between 8 to 12 months. They were at different levels of language proficiency, with TOEFL ITP scores of ranging from 460 to 520. Among the participants, 14 were males and 16 were females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, with the average age of 18.8.

2.2 Instruments

The study used two types of instruments for data collection: materials for intervention sessions and assessment tools for pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test.

2.2.1 Instruction Materials

Materials used for instruction were from Strategic Reading 2 written by Jack C. Richards and Samuela Eckstut-Didier published by Cambridge University Press. Strategic Reading is a three-level series designed to develop reading, vocabulary-building, and critical-thinking skills. The Strategic Reading 2 is a new intermediate reading skills text for adult and young-adult learners of English as a second or foreign language. It is designed to build the reading skills and vocabulary that students need to achieve academic success. The book contains 16 units on contemporary themes. Each unit contains three multiple-genre readings adapted from authentic sources such as newspapers, magazines, books, and websites. Units open by introducing new vocabulary and asking students thought-provoking questions related to the unit theme. On the page opposite the readings are exercises that develop student interest in the theme, provide practice in a variety of text-appropriate reading skills, and offer opportunities for discussion and/or writing. The final page features vocabulary expansion activities and suggestions for extension activities, which can be completed either inside or outside the classroom. Being at the proper level for participants, being up to date, and focusing on vocabulary activities makes this book suitable for intervention sessions of the current study.

2.2.2 Instruments for Pre-test, Post-test, and Follow-up test

Following Peters and Pauwels (2015), two types of tests at different levels of sensitivity were used in order to get an accurate picture of language learners' learning gains: recognition test and cued output test. Nation and Webb (2011) argue that recall tests are more difficult than recognition tests because in the former the form of the lexical item needs to be retrieved from memory, which "requires substantial strength of knowledge in order to answer questions correctly" (p.304). The two types of tests were used as pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. However, the formulaic sequences used in pre-test, post-test and follow-up test were different.

For the recognition test, language learners were provided with three sets of excerpts from reading passages of Strategic Reading 2 in which they had to underline formulaic sequences. The sets of excerpts were respectively used as pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. The reading excerpts were selected from the units, which were not covered in the intervention sessions. In selection of reading excerpts for the tests, it was tried to keep the number of formulaic sequences equal in all tests (12 formulaic sequences in each test).

For the cued output test, three other sets of excerpts from reading passages of Strategic Reading 2, which were not covered in intervention sessions, were used as pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. In this test, again it was tried to keep the number of formulaic sequences equal in all tests (8 formulaic sequences in each test). In this test, language learners were required to supply the formulaic sequence as a whole. For each formulaic sequence, the Japanese translation was provided in brackets. The first letter of each word of the formulaic sequence was also provided in order to prevent language learners from supplying alternative but correct answers.

2.3 Procedure

The study was carried out during the spring semester. At the beginning of the semester, language learners were divided into two parallel groups: a 'focus on form' group and a 'focus on forms' group. During week one before the intervention, language learners took the pre-tests. Language learners were told that these tests were administered to verify their familiarity with academic English. The week following the pre-test, intervention

started. Intervention consisted of eight sessions which were held twice weekly for four consecutive weeks, each session lasting 75 minutes. For each session, one reading passage of Strategic Reading 2 was taught, covering eight reading passages of the book in general. The intervention followed the noticing, retrieving, and generating process to teach formulaic sequences for both groups but at different levels of explicitness for different groups. According to Nation (2001) the first major process to encourage the learning of a lexical item is noticing, that is, directing language learners' attention toward a formulaic sequence and making them aware of its usefulness. The next major process that may help with learning and remembering vocabulary is retrieval, that is, providing language learners with repeated opportunities to retrieve the lexical item that is to be acquired. The third and most effective process for establishing vocabulary knowledge is generation, which "occurs when previously met words are subsequently met or used in ways that differ from the previous meeting with the word" (Nation, 2001, p. 68).

For the 'focus on form' group, the noticing phase involved directing language learners' attention toward formulaic sequences included in the reading passages through highlighting them. In this respect, language learners received copies of the reading passages in which formulaic sequences were written in boldface type. Language learners were asked to read the text as many times as they needed and answer reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises that followed each reading passage. They were allowed to check their dictionaries or ask for the meaning of unfamiliar words or expressions. In the retrieving phase, following Nation and Newton (2009), the disappearing text technique was used. In this technique, a passage of approximately 50 to 60 words containing a number of formulaic sequences was selected and was written on the board and a language learner or two were asked to read it aloud. Then some of the formulaic sequences were deleted and another language learner was asked to read the passage aloud, supplying the missing formulaic sequences as he or she read. Then more formulaic sequences were deleted and this continued until there were no formulaic sequences at all on the board and the language learners were repeating the passage from their memory. In the generating phase, excerpts from other reading sources in which the same formulaic sequences taught during the session had been used in a different context and again in boldface type were given to language learners. Language learners were then asked to read the excerpts and answer the comprehension and vocabulary exercises that followed them.

For the 'focus on forms' group, the noticing phase involved asking language learners to read the passage as many times they needed and answer the comprehension and vocabulary exercises that followed the reading passage. In this phase, language learners were asked to try to guess the meaning of the formulaic sequences from context and/or have the sequences explained to them. In the retrieving phase, an approach, known as role-play or exchange structure, was used. In this approach, language learners were given a context or scenario and were asked to orally exchange information using the target formulaic sequences. For example, one language learner could extend an invitation (e.g., Would you like to come to my birthday party on Friday?) and the other language learner accepted (e.g., Yes, thanks a lot) or refused the invitation (e.g., I'd love to, but ...). In the generating phase, language learners were provided with definitions for target formulaic sequences using example sentences which were different from those encountered in the textual input. Language learners were then asked to isolate target formulaic sequences in sentences and create new texts around them.

Then, respectively one week following intervention in week six and at the end of semester in week sixteen, language learners in both groups took the post-tests and follow-up tests.

2.4 Data Analysis

Following Peters and Pauwels (2015), the pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests were scored as follows:

Recognition tests

- A score of 0 was awarded when language learners did not underline the formulaic sequence or underlined only one word (and not a sequence of words), e.g. 'findings'. Articles and auxiliaries were not taken into account, e.g. 'the findings' was also scored as incorrect.
- A score of 0.5 was awarded when language learners did not underline the complete formulaic sequence, e.g. not the preposition ('the following findings emerged').
- A score of 1 was awarded when language learners underlined the complete formulaic sequence, e.g. 'the following findings emerged from'.

Cued output tests

- Language learners did not receive a score 1) when they did not supply an answer, 2) when one or more of the content words were incorrect or missing ('a certain important' instead of 'a central issue'; 'the evidence' instead of 'the evidence was inconclusive').
- A score of 0.5 was given 1) when the formulaic sequence contained a spelling mistake ('objectif', 'seaks'), 2) when the preposition was incorrect or missing ('little research' or 'little research to'), or 3) when one of the words constituting the formulaic sequence was incorrect but formally similar to the target word ('the main object' instead of 'the main objective').
- A score of 1 was awarded when the formulaic sequence as a whole was correct. Morphological and

grammatical mistakes such as subject-verb agreement were not taken into account. For instance, ‘the results indicates’ was considered correct.

To analyze the performance of language learners on pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests, the results of recognition test and cued output test on each set of tests were combined. As there were 12 items on the recognition tests and 8 items on the cued output tests, language learners could get a total score of 0 to 20 on the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. All tests were scored by two native American raters. The inter-rater reliability for the recognition pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test, as indicated by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r), were respectively $r = 0.92$, $r = 0.90$, and $r = 0.92$. The inter-rater reliability for the cued output pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test, as indicated by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r), were respectively $r = 0.94$, $r = 0.96$, and $r = 0.92$. The items on which the two raters differed were discussed and a consensus was reached.

To determine whether the types of instruction had made any learning gains in language learners from pre-test to post-test and whether they sustained the gains after a period of time, mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was employed. Mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance allows combining between-subjects and within-subjects variables in one analysis (Pallant, 2013). In this respect, both the effectiveness of intervention in general (within-subjects effect) and the effectiveness of specific type of intervention, that is, ‘focus on form’ instruction and ‘focus on forms’ instruction (between-subjects effect) was considered. Partial eta squared was then used to examine the level of effect of intervention for both within-subjects and between-subjects categories. Partial eta squared can range from 0 to 1 and represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (acquisition of formulaic sequences) that is explained by the independent variable (type of intervention) (Pallant, 2013). Cohen (1988) has proposed a set of guidelines to interpret the values of partial eta squared. The guidelines for interpreting the values of eta squared, as proposed by Cohen (1988), are presented in Table 1. Finally, the graphical presentation of the performance of language learners in both ‘focus on form’ group and ‘focus on forms’ group on pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test was provided.

Table 1: Interpretation of Partial Eta Squared Values

Value	Effect Size
0.01	Small Effect
0.06	Moderate Effect
0.14	Large Effect

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

Table 2 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of performance of language learners on pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. The descriptive analysis presented in the table consists of the number of participants for each type of instruction as well as the mean and standard deviation obtained for the performance of each group of participants on pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test. According to the descriptive analysis of the data, the mean score for the performance of language learners in both ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ groups on the knowledge of formulaic sequences enhanced in post-test and follow-up test. However, although the mean score obtained by language learners in the ‘focus on forms’ group was higher than the mean score obtained by language learners in the ‘focus on form’ group immediately following treatment, the pattern was reversed within a period of ten weeks following the treatment. The mean score by itself, however, does not show whether the difference among the three tests and between the two groups is considered significant or not. To determine whether the difference among mean scores obtained by each group over the three tests is significantly different from one another or not, the results of the analysis of mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance need to be observed.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Language Learners’ Performance on Formulaic Sequences Tests

	Type of Instruction	Number of Participants	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	Focus on Form	15	7.53	3.420
	Focus on Forms	15	7.60	3.888
	Total	30	7.57	3.598
Post-test	Focus on Form	15	12.13	3.378
	Focus on Forms	15	13.00	3.000
	Total	30	12.57	3.170
Follow-up Test	Focus on Form	15	13.87	2.973
	Focus on Forms	15	10.33	2.968
	Total	30	12.10	3.428

Table 3 presents the results of the main effect for within-subjects variable (Test: pre-test, post-test, follow-up test). To explore the main effect for within-subjects variable, the value of Wilks’ Lambda and the associated probability value given in the column labeled Significance (Sig.) needs to be considered. All of the multivariate

tests yield the same result; however, the most commonly reported statistic is Wilks' Lambda (Pallant, 2013). A significance value of above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for Wilks' Lambda indicates a non-significant effect whereas a significance value of equal to or less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$) is indicative of a significant effect (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). In the data obtained in the current study, the value of Wilks' Lambda for Test is 0.260, with a significance value of 0.000 (which really means $p < 0.0005$). Because the probability value is less than 0.05, there is a statistically significant effect for Test. This suggests that there was a change in knowledge of formulaic sequences across the three different tests. The main effect for Test was significant.

Table 3: Multivariate Tests^a

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^c
Test	Pillai's Trace	0.740	38.461 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.740	76.923	1.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.260	38.461 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.740	76.923	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	2.849	38.461 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.740	76.923	1.000
	Roy's Largest Root	2.849	38.461 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.740	76.923	1.000
Test*Group	Pillai's Trace	0.839	70.269 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.839	140.538	1.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.161	70.269 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.839	140.538	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	5.205	70.269 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.839	140.538	1.000
	Roy's Largest Root	5.205	70.269 ^b	2.000	27.000	0.000	0.839	140.538	1.000

- a. Design: Intercept + Groups
 Within Subjects Design: Test
 b. Exact statistic
 c. Computed using $\alpha = 0.05$

Although a statistically significant difference among language learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences on different tests (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test) was found, the effect size of this result also needs to be considered to be able to determine the exact size of this difference. In this regard, the value of interest is partial eta squared. The value of partial eta squared obtained for Test in this study is 0.740. Using the commonly used guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988), this result suggests a very large effect size. Expressed as a percentage, 74 percent of variance in the change in language learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences is explained by the treatment they received at different time intervals.

Now that the within-subjects effects have been explored, the main effect for between-subjects variable (type of instruction: 'focus on form' instruction versus 'focus on forms' instruction) needs to be considered. The results that need to be considered are in Table 4. In this respect, the significance value across the row labeled Group (variable name for the type of instruction) should be considered. A significance value of above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for Group indicates a non-significant effect whereas a significance value of equal to or less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$) is indicative of a significant effect (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). In the data obtained in the current study, the value for Group is 0.419. This is more than the alpha level of 0.05, so the main effect for Group is non-significant. There was no significant difference in knowledge of formulaic sequences for the two groups (those who were instructed based on 'focus on form' method and those who were instructed based on 'focus on forms' method).

Table 4: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^a
Intercept	10389.878	1	10389.878	413.495	0.000	0.937	413.495	1.000
Group	16.900	1	16.900	0.673	0.419	0.023	0.673	0.124
Error	703.556	28	25.127					

- a. Computed using $\alpha = 0.05$

Although a statistically non-significant difference between the performance of language learners in the two

groups ('focus on form' group and 'focus on forms' group) was found, the effect size of this result also needs to be considered to be able to determine the exact size of this difference. In this regard, the value of interest is again partial eta squared. The value of partial eta squared obtained for Group in this study is 0.023 which, according to the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988), indicates a small effect size. Expressed as a percentage, 2.3 percent of variance in the change in language learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences is explained by the type of treatment they received.

The graphical presentation of language learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences in both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' groups in pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test has been depicted in Figure 1. As Figure 1 shows, although language learners in 'focus on forms' instruction group outperformed their counterparts in 'focus on form' instruction group immediately following the intervention and the pattern was reversed within a period of time following the intervention, the difference was not statistically significant and language learners in both groups, generally, exhibited a significant improvement in knowledge of formulaic sequences following intervention and maintained the obtained knowledge after ten weeks following the intervention.

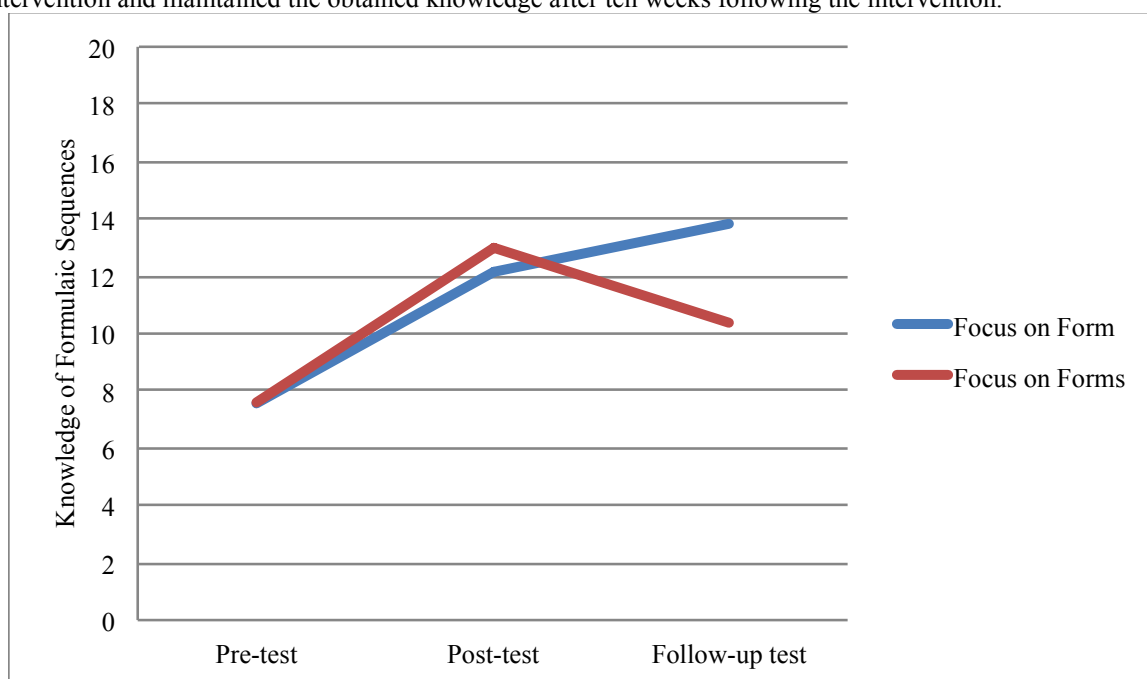


Figure 1: Language Learners' Knowledge of Formulaic Sequences Prior to and Following Form-Focused Instruction

3.2 Discussion

The study found that form-focused instruction is very effective in both developing knowledge of formulaic sequences and sustaining the obtained knowledge in language learners. The study also found that both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instructing formulaic sequences are equally effective for immediate and long-term goals. Language learners in both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' instruction groups demonstrated a significant progress in knowledge of target language formulaic sequences immediately following a four-week instruction period and managed to retain the obtained knowledge for ten weeks following the instruction. Therefore, all three null hypotheses of the study which state that form-focused instruction is not effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences, 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction are not equally effective in developing knowledge of formulaic sequences, and 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' methods of instruction cannot equally lead to the retention of knowledge of formulaic sequences are rejected.

These findings can be explained through Noticing Hypothesis. Noticing Hypothesis introduced by Schmidt (1990) states that "people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (Schmidt, 2001:30). This hypothesis emphasizes that in order for the input to become intake, the detection of input in the form of awareness and attention is necessary (Schmidt, 1995). Not all input has equal value and only that input which is noticed then becomes available for intake and effective processing (Schmidt, 1990; 2001). Intake is part of the input which is being paid attention to and is taken into short-term memory and consequently is integrated into the interlanguage, a language independent from both the language learner's native language and the target language (Selinker, 1972).

The three stages of noticing, retrieving, and generating target language formulaic sequences adopted for instructing target language formulaic sequences during the intervention period of the study, although using different procedures for ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ instruction groups, were equally effective for both groups of language learners’ noticing of target language forms helping target language input to turn into intake and processed effectively. In this respect, not only language learners’ attention was directed toward target language forms (noticing phase), but also language learners were provided with repeated opportunities to retrieve the target language formulaic sequences (retrieval phase) and use them in ways that differed from the ways they were used previously (generating phase) (Hatami, 2015). This helped to guarantee the acquisition of target language formulaic sequences that were noticed.

Although the formulaic sequences used to assess language learners’ knowledge of target language formulaic sequences differed from the ones used during intervention, the awareness of target language formulaic sequences developed in them through noticing, retrieving, and generating techniques helped them to consciously look up the meaning of formulaic sequences they encountered in the course of their language studies. This has most probably been the reason to maintain and increase their knowledge of target language formulaic sequences even months following the intervention period. This supports the ideas that devoting the class time to activities that raise language learners’ awareness of ubiquity of formulaic sequences instead of spending time on teaching particular formulaic sequences brings out better outcomes (Lewis, 1993). In this respect, an enhanced awareness of target language formulaic sequences not only fosters independent learning because language learners will be more inclined to notice formulaic sequences in the samples of target language they engage with outside the language classroom but also language learners will be more attentive to information about the syntagmatic behavior of words they look up in a dictionary (Boers and Lindstromberg, 2012).

The findings obtained in the current study are in line with the findings obtained in the study conducted by Rafieyan et al. (2014) who found both ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ methods of instructing formulaic sequences equally effective in developing language learners’ knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. The findings obtained in the current study also support the findings obtained in the studies conducted by Boers et al. (2006) and Peters and Pauwels (2015) who investigated the effectiveness of ‘focus on forms’ method of instructing formulaic sequences and found it effective in developing language learners’ knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. The findings of the current study, however, are not consistent with the findings obtained in the study by Peters (2012) who found the superiority of ‘focus on form’ method of instructing formulaic sequences over ‘focus on forms’ method of instructing formulaic sequences in developing language learners’ knowledge of target language formulaic sequences.

4. Conclusion

The study compared the effect of two form-focused methods of instructing formulaic sequences including ‘focus on form’ method and ‘focus on forms’ method on the development of knowledge of target language formulaic sequences and the sustainability of the obtained knowledge. The findings of the study revealed that both ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ methods of instructing formulaic sequences are equally effective for the development and sustainability of knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. Language learners in both ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’ instruction groups demonstrated an equally significant progress in knowledge of target language formulaic sequences right after intervention and maintained the acquired knowledge over a period of time following the intervention. The findings indicate that target language formulaic sequences should be the indispensable part of foreign language instruction (Rafieyan, 2015; Rafieyan, 2016a; Rafieyan, 2016b).

The study was limited in some ways, however. First of all, there were only 15 participants for each instruction method, making up a total of 30 participants. The results derived from this low number of participants, consequently, can hardly be generalized to the whole population. Secondly, the retention of the acquired knowledge through different methods of instruction was assessed only after two months. A two-month period is not considered a long period to determine the level of sustainability of the knowledge for the two different instructional procedures. Finally, the study did not involve a comparison with the effect of instruction during an educational sojourn to investigate the role of learning environment in the development of knowledge of target language formulaic sequences. Therefore, future studies are recommended to include more participants into three groups of ‘focus on form’, ‘focus on forms’, and ‘study-abroad’ and assess the retention of the instruction in intervals of six and twelve months.

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