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The Effects of Controlled and Reconstructive Oral Repetition on the Acquisition of Lexical Phrases

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Abstract

This is a pseudo-experimental study that investigates the effectiveness of form-focused instructional techniques to facilitate the acquisition of lexical phrases. A group of Japanese university students, enrolled in a communicative EFL course, were guided to use and learn lexical phrases through controlled and reconstructive oral repetition tasks. The overall effect of combined repetition tasks on the participants' acquisition of lexical phrases and the extent to which controlled repetition might mediate the effectiveness of reconstructive repetition practice were evaluated. The results indicated that the combination of controlled and reconstructive repetition, contextualized in communicative EFL instruction, facilitated their acquisition of lexical phrases at a statistically significant level. On the other hand, controlled repetition enhanced the short-term retention of target phrases learned through the reconstructive repetition tasks and communicative tasks but did not contribute to long-term acquisition.

Introduction

This study explores an effective way to teach Japanese EFL learners formulaic expressions or sentence structures that are remembered and retrieved as unanalyzed wholes (e. g., idioms, collocations, or fixed phrasal structures). Formulaic language is commonly referred to as *lexical phrases* (Nattinger, 1980; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Lewis, 1993, 1997), *formulaic sequences* (Wray, 2000, 2002; Schmitt & Carter, 2004), or *multiple-word items* (Moon, 1997). The definitions vary from researcher to researcher (see the *Definitions and Functions of Formulaic Language* section), but, in this research study, the term *lexical phrase* is used consistently.

The present study also advocates a combination of focus-on-form and focus-on-formS instructional treatments. In the past 30 years, language acquisition theories have tended to emphasize the important roles of *comprehensible output* (Swain, 1985, 1991; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), *interactions* between L2 learners and native speakers or more advanced learners (Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, 1987, 1988), and *noticing* of the gaps between interlanguage and target language (Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 2001), which has led to various studies on focus-on-form instruction. The principle of focus-on-form is to draw learners' attention to target grammatical rules or exemplars during primarily meaning-focused communicative tasks; it is imperative that learners engage in cognitive processing. This is contrasted with the traditional focus-on-formS instruction that presents isolated grammatical rules or exemplars declaratively.

Recently, however, some studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of combined focus-on-form and focus-on-formS instruction (Williams & Evans, 1998; Muranoi, 2000). The present study is another attempt to explore an optimal combination of focus-on-form and focus-on-formS activities. The target grammatical forms are lexical phrases that are normally learned and used as unanalyzed chunks, less dependent on online construction of individual lexical items.

In this study, focus-on-form is operationalized as reconstructive oral repetition of target lexical phrases, contextualized in communicative language-learning activities. Focus-on-formS is operationalized as controlled—or intensive, mechanical—oral repetition drills, which may help learners reinforce their memory of target phrases. The first major research objective is to measure the effects of multiple focus-on-form and focus-on-formS activities on learners' acquisition of lexical phrases. The second is to investigate the extent to which the controlled focus-on-formS oral repetition practice might mediate the effectiveness of the contextualized, reconstructive focus-on-form repetition activities that are designed to activate some low-level cognitive processing.

Review of the Literature

This section briefly reviews: (a) the practical purposes of controlled repetition practice and its limitations, (b) the major characteristic features of lexical phrases, (c) the basic concepts and definitions of focus-on-form and focus-on-formS instruction, (d) example communicative activities that involve repetition tasks; and (e) practical approaches to the learning of idioms, collocations, and other types of lexical phrases.

Roles and Limitations of Controlled Oral Repetition

It has been pointed out that controlled—or mechanical—repetition practice (i.e., parrot-like repetition and substitution drills) does not directly translate into communicative language use (DeKeyser, 1998). As a major tenet of Audio-lingual Method, the administration of repetition practice was based on the assumption that language learning is a mechanical system of habit-formation and reinforcement through stimulus-response exercises. The opponents of this approach insisted that second or foreign language learners must, instead, engage in cognitive processing to acquire linguistic rules or exemplars so that they can use them in interpersonal communications. On the other hand, some researchers have indicated that different types of repetition practice serve different purposes and that even the mechanical repetition contributes to second language acquisition. Paulston (1971) classified structural pattern drills into three types (i.e., mechanical, meaningful, and communicative) and argued that even mechanical repetition drills can help beginning language learners, or learners of languages that are drastically different from L1, to produce target forms fluently. Another researcher who recognized a role played by

controlled practice is Lamendella (1979), who discussed the functions of mechanical pattern-practice drills from a neurofunctional perspective based on aphasic patients' data. He proposed that a speech copying circuit through which language learners reproduce articulate phonological patterns exists independently from higher language-processing systems. Whereas mechanical pattern drills may not translate into learners' communicative skills in real-world interactions, this copying circuit can facilitate low-level language manipulation such as retrieving accurate phonological forms and substituting parts of target phrasal structures, which can improve learners' overall linguistic abilities.

The critical issue in classroom language teaching, then, is how and to what extent controlled repetition practice should be utilized. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), as advocates of the instruction of lexical phrases, observed, "There is nothing wrong with memorizing some essential chunks, especially at the beginning stages of language learning [...] The challenge for the teacher would be to use such drills to allow confidence and fluency, yet not overdo them to the point that they become mindless exercise" (p. 116). Willis (1990), also a proponent of lexical syllabi that emphasize the teaching of useful formulaic phrases and sentences, stated that "controlled practice [...] should be little and often" (p. 73), suggesting that it is best to administer a limited amount of repetition practice at a time and do so repeatedly over time. That is, on the one hand, memorization of lexical phrases or prefabricated multi-word units through pattern drills does not in itself enable L2 learners to carry out native-like communication in the target language and, when administered excessively, can fatigue learners. On the other hand, controlled oral repetition can familiarize learners with essential structural forms in the target language and prepare them to use them in communicative language-learning contexts with greater accuracy, fluency, and confidence as long as they are administered moderately and over an extended period time.

The order in which communicative tasks and controlled practice are administered should also be carefully considered. As mentioned above, administering controlled practice at the beginning of a learner's language learning plan or process might be one practical approach in that he/she can be familiarized with lexical or phonological patterns before attempting to manipulate them online for communicative tasks. However, another practical—and probably better—approach is to fine-tune the language skills that one has already acquired to a certain extent. Nunan (2004) suggested that controlled practice should be administered after some meaning-focused, communicative activities so that learners have been exposed to target forms from a communicative perspective and are ready to establish links between linguistic forms and the communicative functions that they serve. Willis and Willis (2007) also advocated the idea of administering focus-on-formS treatment after exposing learners to target forms repeatedly during multiple meaning-focused activities. They emphasize the importance of sequencing meaning-focused and form-focused tasks in an appropriate way and point out that focus-on-formS training (e. g., rote-memorization of useful sentences) can

contribute to language acquisition as long as a variety of meaning-focused tasks precede it. Learners are gradually familiarized with target linguistic patterns in the process of achieving tasks and become motivated to use the forms they are guided to focus on. As a specific example, Lopes (2004) reported on the successful conversion from the so-called PPP approach (presentation, practice, production) to an instructional cycle that began with a speaking task and ended with a grammar analysis activity at a Brazilian EFL school. In other words, there is nothing inherently problematic about controlled practice, although it may not be effectively utilized when presented in the PPP process that tends to deprive learners of opportunities to discover novel structures through meaning-focused activities.

Definitions and Functions of Formulaic Language

Nattinger (1980) and Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) used the term *lexical phrase* to refer to the formulaic phrases or sentences that native speakers use routinely and ritualistically. According to their view, lexical phrases include not only idioms and firmly fixed collocations (e. g., *for the most part*, *all in all*, *the public seldom forgives twice*) but also such basic phrases or sentence structures as *a __ ago*, *if it were ___*, *my point is that __*, and *the __ -er, the __ -er*, which have slots to be filled with diverse lexical items. That is, lexical phrases include all phrasal units or sentence structures that learners remember and retrieve as unanalyzed wholes. Paradigmatic variation (e. g., *for example/for instance*) or syntagmatic variation (e. g., *to make a long story short/to make an extremely long story short*) provides room for generativity. Nattinger and DeCarrico have emphasized the pragmatic functions of lexical phrases to the extent that frozen forms such as idioms (e. g., *kick the bucket*, *it's raining cats and dogs*) and clichés (e. g., *a good time was had by all*) might be excluded from the category of lexical phrases. Phrases that can be transformed or expanded for creative language use are considered to be important, which they cited as evidence for their theoretical proposal that there are intermediaries between the levels of lexis and grammar.

Willis's lexical approach (1990) advocates the same pedagogical role of lexical phrases. In order to compensate for the weaknesses of grammar-based syllabi, Willis organized a meaning-focused syllabus that helps learners manipulate commonly or frequently used lexical phrases, instead of investing a huge amount of time and effort to explain complex sets of grammatical rules (e. g., verb system, reported speech, subjunctives). It is more economical to use the limited class time for teaching functional structures in communicative contexts (e. g., presenting participles as adjectives, not as part of a difficult verb tense and aspect system). It is also important not to confuse learners with time-consuming tasks of learning complex syntactic rules. That is to say, showing how to use useful phrases and clauses is more meaningful and productive than explaining how they are syntactically formed. For example, *way* is a high-frequency word and collocates with various words to form such useful

formulaic structures as *by the way*, *by way of*, *all the way*, and *the way to*. The teacher may first teach *the best way to…is to…*as a prefabricated structure with slots to fill in and subsequently introduce a number of similar structures, such as *the idea is to…*and *one possibility would be to…*, which contributes to the production of meaningful and idiomatic speech.

Likewise, Lewis (1997) challenged the view that language consists of two basic dimensions: i.e., grammar and vocabulary. He classified prefabricated, multi-word lexical units into three types: collocations, fixed expressions, and semi-fixed expressions. Collocations are certain combinations of words that co-occur with greater than random frequency; they range from fully fixed composites of lexical items (e. g., *a broken home*, *to catch a cold*) to more loosely fixed composites and to novel inventions (e. g., *it is a case of the tail wagging the dog*). Fixed expressions include social greetings, politeness phrases, "phrase book" language that travelers use, and idioms whose meanings cannot easily be reconstructed based on the meanings of individual words (e. g., *kick the bucket*). Semi-fixed expressions can be freely modified or combined with other words or phrases; this type corresponds to what Nattinger and DeCarrico refer to as the phrasal or sentence-structure patterns that perform grammatical functions. The produced phrases, clauses, and sentences can be used to express complex ideas creatively, invalidating the view that language is made up of *fixed* vocabulary and *generative* grammar.

Wray used the terms *formulaic sequence* (2000, 2002) and *morpheme equivalent unit* (2008), emphasizing that the acquisition of formulaic language would facilitate L2 learners' native-like use of the target language. She stated that "[g]aining full command of a new language requires the learner to become sensitive to the native speaker's preferences for certain sequences of words over others that might appear just as possible" (p. 463). She also indicated that native speakers remember a greater number of idiomatic phrases, collocations, or formulaic utterances as unanalyzed wholes than nonnative speakers and can retrieve and use them as fixed forms with great facility. The mastery of idioms and collocations facilitates not only learners' fluency in speech or writing but also their swift and accurate understanding of spoken and written messages. Using formulaic phrases and sentences also enables learners to save precious attentional resources for pragmatic- or discourse-level language production. Theoretically, the memorization and retrieval of formulaic sequences may run counter to the theorizing about the creative nature of human languages or communicative, cognitive language teaching approaches. Wray (2000) acknowledged this theoretical contradiction and the fact that adult L2 language learners who use prefabricated phrases for communication cannot normally derive grammatical rules from mere exposure to the chunks. Nonetheless, she claimed that the use and acquisition of formulaic language plays an important role in second language acquisition.

Definitions and Functions of Focus-on-Form and Focus-on-FormS

First of all, form-focused instruction was originally differentiated from meaning-focused instruction in which learners are not guided to attend to any particular grammatical rule or lexical item. The target units for form-focused learning can either be the grammatical system (e. g., syntactic rules) or exemplars (e. g., pronunciations, vocabulary items, morphology endings, and collocations); the major assumption is that they are problematic items that present a challenge to language learners. Normally, form-focused instruction is dichotomously divided into focus-on-form and focus-on-formS (Long 1991, Doughty & Williams, 1998), but definitions vary depending on research or teaching contexts. For example, Ellis (2001) categorized form-focused instruction into three types: focus-on-formS, planned focus-on-form, and incidental focus-on-form. In the present study, I refer to focus-on-form and focus-on-formS as contrastive instructional treatments, although comparing focus-on-form and focus-on-formS as global methods is by no means the aim of this study.

Regarding the focus-on-formS vs. (planned or incidental) focus-on-form distinction, several definitions exist, including the original definition by Long (1991) and a modified definition by Doughty and Williams (1998). According to Long's original definition, focus-on-formS refers to a type of instruction in which one isolated linguistic item is taught at a time, and language teaching is based on a structural syllabus. Focus-on-form requires learners to pay attention to certain grammatical rules or items in tasks and activities that are primarily meaning-focused. In the focus-on-form instruction, learners are not aware that they are learning a specific structure, and meaning takes precedence over form.

According to Doughty and Williams's (1998) definition, focus-on-formS instruction is directed only at formal accuracy in the form of traditional, controlled exercises, and focus-on-form instruction is designed to help learners establish form-meaning mappings. Even in focus-on-form instruction, learners might be informed of what grammatical structures they are learning. Activities and tasks are not primarily meaning-focused; instead, form and meaning are emphasized equally. In this study, the latter definitions of focus-on-form and focus-on-formS proposed by Doughty and Williams are employed.

Repetition Tasks Involving Cognitive Processing

Controlled oral repetition practice can always be utilized in tandem with separate communicative activities that provide learners with opportunities to practice using the target forms. Leaver and Kaplan (2004) proposed that teachers focus on one theme and engage learners in various tasks, so that the learners can practice using the forms related to the same theme or topics repeatedly: some tasks are controlled exercises, and others are communicative activities. Likewise, Saito-Abbott (2004) discussed the advantages of administering a task-based instruction program made up of several different tasks. However, it is also possible to design a task-based repetition practice that activates low-level cognitive

processing in itself and provides learners with opportunities for repetition without boredom.

One model for practical repetition practice is Di Pietro's (1982) *open-ended scenario*. It operates on the use of lexical phrases with slots to fill in, which resonates with Nattinger and DeCarrico's (1992) and Willis's (1990) idea of teaching lexical phrases. In Di Pietro's model of role-play, the teacher sets up a conversational situation similar to a real-life communicative interaction and guides learners to freely manipulate the basic formulaic phrasal structures provided. Learners recycle the useful phrases in conversational situations, instead of repeating rigidly prescribed sentences verbatim, and transform or expand them to convey their original ideas. The conversational set-ups are designed to develop from one phase to another, and learners strive to find and use appropriate functional phrases to convey their ideas. In other words, learners strive to learn form-function composites through a series of related speaking activities.

Another approach to contextualizing oral repetition practice was proposed by Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988), who tried to create activities where learners need, and desire, to repeatedly use prefabricated phrases and formulaic sentence patterns that represent basic language functions (e. g., directing, requesting, asking questions, describing past activities) within realistic communicative interactions. For example, learners practice negotiating their respective positions for taking a class picture and, in the process of expressing their own ideas in the tasks, learn and repeatedly use high-frequency formulaic phrases: e. g., *to the right of A*, *in front of*, or *between B and C*.

Yet another example of oral repetition practice that involves cognitive processing is *elicited oral imitation*. Erlam (2009) utilized this task for testing purposes, but it can easily be transformed into language learning activities. Instead of simply making learners repeat provided spoken statements, she presented grammatical and ungrammatical sentences and guided them to repeat the grammatical sentences and produce the repaired forms of ungrammatical sentences. Thus, the learners' repetition was reconstructive: they decode and interpret the stimuli before reproducing the target forms, instead of repeating the forms verbatim.

Finally, Nation's (1975) *blackboard reproduction*, or Willis and Willis's (2007) *progressive deletion*, deserves special attention. The teacher writes a sentence on the blackboard and starts erasing some of the words. Students are instructed to recall the missing words and read out loud the original sentence from memory. Although it looks like a mechanical exercise, learners reflect on the structure of a phrase or sentence very carefully and strive to restore the original sentence. One advantage of this type of oral repetition task is that it can be used to teach any set of expressions or lexical phrases by just preparing a short passage that contextualizes the use of target forms. The reconstructive oral repetition in the present study is modeled on this technique, utilizing PowerPoint instead of blackboard and chalk.

Strategies for Learning Fixed Lexical Phrases

One major issue regarding foreign- or second-language learners' acquisition of lexical phrases might be whether they memorize all target phrases by rote as unanalyzed wholes or whether they resort, at least partially, to some analytical strategy. Collocation (i.e., two or more words that tend to occur together or in close proximity to each other) is sometimes semantically transparent: i.e., the meanings of some collocations can be deduced from those of individual components. Based on the results of his corpus-based study, Walker (2011) indicated that collocations are not necessarily arbitrarily formed and provided evidence that semantic or pragmatic features can partially, if not entirely, explain why, or how, certain collocations are formed. That is, pedagogically, rote-memorization is not the one and only way to learn collocations; they can be learned either as unanalyzed wholes or analyzable linguistic units. Researchers who investigate L2 learners' use or acquisition of collocations cannot take it for granted that learners memorize them as chunks without using any analytical strategy.

Kennedy (2003) argued for the advantage of teaching collocations both implicitly and explicitly. Based on his corpus data, he proposed that it is possible to explain which amplifiers (i. e., adverbs that intensify the following adjectives) and adjectives are compatible in terms of the latter's semantic and syntactic features. For example, *perfectly* often amplifies the adjectives that end in *-able* or *-ible*, and *badly* is particularly associated with damage (e. g., *bruised*, *corroded*). Maximizing learners' exposure to target collocations is crucial, but explicit instruction of some frequent collocations can facilitate language acquisition. Liu (2010) also conducted a corpus-based study, producing evidence that many collocations are semantically motivated, instead of being arbitrary, and proposed that cognitive semantic analysis should be practiced as a strategy for learning collocations in addition to—not in place of—the noticing-and-memorization strategy.

Idioms are more likely to be lexically fixed and semantically opaque than collocations. However, Simpson and Mendis (2003) advocated the use of both holistic and analytical approaches to learning idioms. When the holistic meaning of an idiom tends to be distinctly different from the meanings of its constituent parts (e. g., *read the handwriting on the wall*, *out of whack*), learners might be encouraged to memorize and retrieve it as an unanalyzed string of words. On the other hand, if the constituents provide hints for predicting or remembering the meaning of an idiom (e. g., *a drop in the bucket*), there is no reason why learners should not take the analytical approach as well even if native speakers tend to memorize them as chunks.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what extent does the combination of focus-on-form and focus-on-

formS instruction facilitate the participants' acquisition of lexical phrases?

Research Question 2: To what extent does the controlled oral repetition practice mediate the effectiveness of the contextualized, reconstructive focus-on-form repetition tasks?

Method

Participants

Participants were 31 students enrolled in a movie-based EFL course at a private university in Tokyo. This university is one of the most prestigious private universities in Japan, and the participants' academic proficiencies were very high. Their English proficiency could also be safely regarded as high because the pertinent movie-based course was labeled as an advanced EFL course, and only those who had scored 720 or higher (out of the maximum of 1000) on Web-based Test for English Communication (equivalent to a TOEIC score of 690 or higher) were permitted to take it. Twenty-three were English majors whereas seven majored in social sciences and one majored in mathematics. There were two freshmen, 13 juniors, 15 seniors, and one fifth-year student (or repeater) in the group. Eleven were women, and 20 were men.

Instructional Treatment

The pertinent EFL course, which ran over an entire academic year, or two semesters, was designed to develop participants' overall English skills. The emphasis was on their acquisition of useful lexical phrases through movie-based activities. They were exposed to a variety of lexical phrases and guided to use some of them in speaking and writing activities. A series of form-focused tasks were administered repeatedly during the class sessions. As teacher of the class, I tried to: (1) draw participants' attention to, and guide them to use, target lexical phrases through communicative activities (i. e., focus-on-form) and (2) further enhance their memory of certain lexical phrases through oral repetition practice (i.e., focus-on-formS).

First, participants watched a 20- to 30-minute film clip. They watched a total of six English-language movies, viewing a small section at each class meeting. The handout, which was distributed a week before each class session, contained comprehension questions and parts of important dialogs extracted from the film clip; the participants were instructed to study it in advance. The target lexical phrases were highlighted in bold. During movie watching, the English dialogue and English subtitles were used so that participants could rely on both aural and written input to follow the plot and recognize target lexical phrases. After watching a film clip, the participants answered 10 to 15 comprehension questions (printed on the handout and also displayed on the PowerPoint screen in class) to make sure that they had understood the major points of the movie. Several students were randomly called on to answer the questions.

Second, the class divided into small groups of five or six and discussed the social or moral issues depicted in the film clip. The students were encouraged to carry on their group discussion in English but were permitted to switch back to their first language when they found it difficult to generate meaningful, detailed ideas in English. They were warned, however, that a representative of each group would have to speak publically in English afterward; the group representatives were advised to rehearse their speeches within their groups before speaking in front of the entire class.

Third, after the group discussion, the leader of each group presented the summary of their discussion or their general comments on the movie in English in front of the entire class. The members of each group took turns in serving as a discussion leader and speaker. The speakers were allowed to have only a list of key words as support: i.e., reading a prepared script out loud was prohibited.

Fourth, participants were engaged in oral-cloze activities modeled on *blackboard reproduction*, or *progressive deletion*, in order to reinforce their memory of target lexical phrases. A set of PowerPoint slides were prepared. The first slide displayed a summary of a major scene. The semantic meanings and syntactic structures of difficult words or lexical phrases were explained. The second and third slides for each movie clip displayed the same written summary with parts of the target lexical phrases left out. One or two small groups were called on to fill in the blanks and read the entire passage out loud in unison. As focus-on-formS treatment, all participants were instructed to read out loud some of the target lexical phrases—highlighted in bold—in chorus.

Finally, in addition to the group leaders' oral presentations, all students submitted a short English essay of approximately 100 to 200 words, presenting their individual ideas. They were instructed to write two paragraphs, summarizing one interesting scene in the movie clip in the first paragraph and presenting their personal opinions in the second. They were encouraged to use as many of the target lexical phrases as possible, and the use of at least two lexical phrases was strongly recommended. The essays were returned to the students at the next class meeting with content and linguistic feedback.

Again, the repetitive use, or recycling, of the same lexical phrases in different activities was intended to facilitate participants' acquisition of the forms. The in-class activities were primarily meaning-focused in that participants reflected on the major concepts, events, or ideas described in film clips. They were guided to find appropriate forms to express their own ideas during communicative activities. Then, controlled oral repetition was believed to increase learners' kinesthetic familiarity with the lexical phrases to which they had been exposed. The participants were guided to orally repeat each focus-on-formS phrase only once or twice in one activity context so that they would not be fatigued.

It must be noticed that mechanical oral repetition of target phrases was intended to be focus-on-formS in this project, whereas the oral-cloze exercise, in which learners strove to

retrieve the missing words in a short passage and read the entire passage out loud, was categorized more as focus-on-form in this study, although the latter might be more precisely categorized as an intermediary between focus-on-form and focus-on-formS activities. Discussion, oral presentation, and essay writing, in which they had chances to use target phrases freely and spontaneously, might be regarded as more clearly focus-on-form-oriented activities.

Analysis

Prior to the administration of the ANOVAs, the participants' scores on the multiple-choice and partial-translation tests were transformed into Rasch measures. The Rasch analysis provides a number of advantages over the use of learners' raw test scores (Bond & Fox, 2007). First, Rasch measures are useful for accurate statistical measurement because they are equal-interval measures that are derived from the probabilistic relationships between person abilities and item difficulties. Second, the model provides information concerning misfit for both persons and items; researchers can choose to delete the data that do not fit the prescribed analysis model. Third, the item-person map visually depicts the relationship between person ability and item difficulty. Finally, Rasch models easily deal with missing data; thus, the results can be used for ANOVAs without adjustments being made for missing responses.

At the beginning of the year, the participants took a pretest that consisted of two sections: (a) a 34-item multiple-choice test that required participants to choose the most appropriate word out of three alternatives to form a lexical phrase and complete a given sentence (hereafter referred to as multiple-choice test) and (b) a 32-item partial-translation test that required them to write an English lexical phrase in the blank to complete a sentence, relying on an equivalent Japanese phrase provided as a hint (hereafter as partial-translation test). The lexical phrases tested on the two tests were basically the same except that the multiple-choice test included two additional items, but the order of the question items was changed. The multiple-choice test was conducted at the first class session, and the partial-translation test—the more difficult version—was administered at the second class meeting.

Then, the posttests, including multiple-choice and partial-translation sections, were conducted toward the end of the academic year. The partial-translation test was conducted a week after the multiple-choice test. The posttest contained the same target phrases as the pretests, but they were scrambled and mixed with a few additional items to prevent any possible test effect.

Two *t*-tests (one for the multiple-choice test and one for the partial-translation test) were performed to measure the extent to which the participants' knowledge of lexical phrases improved over the experimental period. On the multiple-choice test, participants

earned one point for each correct answer and zero points for an incorrect answer or no answer. Their raw scores were transformed into Rasch measures, using the dichotomous Rasch model. On the partial-translation test, participants were given two points for writing a target lexical phrase perfectly, one point for a partially correct answer, and zero points for a completely incorrect answer or no answer. The scores were then transformed to Rasch measures, using the partial credit Rasch model.

The second major goal was to investigate the extent to which focus-on-formS oral repetition might enhance the participants' memory of the phrases to which they had been exposed, i.e., mediating the effects of focus-on-form activities. *T*-tests were conducted for within-subjects comparison. As mentioned above, lexical phrases can be classified into several different types. A pair of lexical phrases that were structurally similar had been extracted from each film clip, and the participants had been guided in class to orally repeat one of the two matched phrases (i. e., focus-on-formS phrase) during or immediately after each focus-on-form activity. As participants engaged in several focus-on-form activities within a class session and read the target phrase out loud once or twice after each activity, they ended up orally repeating each focus-on-formS target phrase at least five or six times. The degrees to which the participants memorized the two sets of lexical phrases—i. e., either with or without the enhancement by controlled oral repetition tasks—until the end of the year were compared by performing *t*-tests. In other words, a few pairs of lexical phrases were selected from each movie as data for statistical analysis: one phrase in each pair had been the target form for controlled oral repetition.

An additional test of within-subjects comparison between the two treatments was conducted based on the participants' weekly test scores. Immediately after watching each film clip, participants took a weekly multiple-choice test on lexical phrases, which was intended to measure their short-term memory of target lexical phrases. A partial-translation test on the same lexical phrases was administered after participants finished watching an entire movie (i.e., every third to fifth week). The participants were informed at the beginning of the course that their scores on these weekly, or mid-term, tests would not affect their final grades for the course. A two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to evaluate the effects of treatment (focus-on-form-only and focus-on-form-and-formS) and test (multiple-choice and translation tests) on the participants' short-term retention of lexical phrases.

The alpha level for all statistical analyses was set at .05.

Results

The participants' raw scores were first transformed into Rasch person measures, which, in turn, were converted to response probability units (CHIPS) that ranged from 20 to 80. Table 1 displays the separation and reliability values for the pre- and posttests and the

weekly tests. The person separation for multiple-choice weekly tests and the item separation for multiple-choice and translation weekly tests did not meet the 2.00 criterion. The person reliability for multiple-choice pre-and-posttests and multiple-choice and translation weekly tests, as well as the item reliability for multiple-choice pre-and-posttests and multiple-choice and translation weekly tests did not meet the .90 criterion. However, all separation and reliability values were generally high.

Table 1. ***Separation and Reliability of the Pretest, Posttest, and Weekly Tests***

	Person Separation	Person Reliability	Item Separation	Item Reliability
Multiple-Choice Pre- and Posttests	2.32	0.84	2.65	0.88
Translation Pre- and Posttest	4.04	0.94	3.61	0.93
Multiple-Choice Weekly Tests	1.38	0.66	1.75	0.75
Translation Weekly Tests	2.68	0.88	1.95	0.79

Results of *t*-Tests on the Pre- and Posttests Scores

In order to measure the extent to which participants learned the target lexical phrases through the movie-based communicative EFL course, *t*-tests were conducted on the data from the pre- and posttests, including the multiple-choice and translation sections. The *t*-test on multiple-choice test scores was administered with *test* (multiple-choice pretest and posttest) as an independent variable and their scores on each test as dependent variables. The original number of participants was 31, but one student took a leave of absence in the fall to study abroad. Then, nine participants missed either the preset or the posttest, so the *N*-size was reduced to 21. In order to eliminate a possible outlier, the *z*-scores of the remaining participants were checked, and it was confirmed that there was no one whose *z*-score exceeded the +3.29 criterion. Tables 2 and 3 display the descriptive statistics for multiple-choice and translation tests, respectively.

The mean for the multiple-choice pretest was 49.87 (*SD*=2.93), and the mean for the multiple-choice posttest was 58.55 (*SD*=5.69): there was a noticeable difference in the

Table 2. ***Descriptive Statistics for the Multiple-Choice Pretest and Posttest***

		Pretest	Posttest
M		49.87	58.55
95%CI	Lower Bound	48.54	55.96
	Upper Bound	51.20	61.14
SD		2.93	5.69
Skewness		0.12	0.50
SES		0.50	0.50
Kurtosis		−0.84	2.83
SEK		0.97	0.97

Note. *N*=21.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for the Translation Pretest and Posttest*

		Pretest	Posttest
M		43.00	56.18
95%CI	Lower Bound	41.70	53.94
	Upper Bound	44.30	58.42
SD		3.08	5.30
Skewness		−0.41	1.03
SES		0.47	0.47
Kurtosis		−0.57	1.30
SEK		0.92	0.92

Note. $N=24$.

participants' scores between the two tests. The kurtosis of 2.83 for the posttest was a little worrisome. The kurtosis for the pretest and the skewness for both pre- and posttests were within the acceptable range of $<\pm 1.96$. The *t*-test result showed that the posttest mean was significantly higher than the pretest mean, $t(20)=9.21$, $p=.001$, $r=.90$ (showing that the factor accounts for 90% of the variance), producing evidence that the combination of focus-on-form and focus-and-formS instruction was effective for the acquisition of lexical phrases.

The second *t*-test was performed on the data drawn from the translation pretest and posttest. One student dropped out in the fall for the above-mentioned reason, and six students missed either the pretest or the posttest; therefore, the *N*-size was reduced to 24. The mean for the translation pretest was 43.00 ($SD=3.08$), and the mean for the translation posttest was 56.18 ($SD=5.30$): again, there was a rather large difference between the two tests. The skewness and kurtosis values for both pre- and posttests were within the acceptable range of $<\pm 1.96$. The *t*-test result showed that the posttest mean was significantly higher than the pretest mean, $t(23)=15.20$, $p=.001$, $r=.95$, evidence that the combined form-focused instruction was effective.

Results of *t*-Tests on the Progress Means

In order to evaluate the extent to which the controlled oral repetition enhanced the participants' long-term memory of lexical phrases learned through the reconstructive oral repetition and communicative tasks, two *t*-tests were administered: i. e., one *t*-test for the multiple-choice test and the other for the partial-translation test. The first *t*-test was conducted to compare the multiple-choice progress means on focus-on-form-plus-formS (FonFS) and focus-on-form-only (FonF) lexical phrases. The progress means for FonFS and FonF (i. e., the differences between the multiple-choice post- and pretests means for FonFS lexical items and the differences for the FonF lexical items) were computed, and these two pairs of means were compared by means of a *t*-test. Table 4 shows the pre-FonFS mean, post-FonFS mean, pre-FonF mean, post-FonF mean, the FonFS mean difference (or progress mean), and the FonF mean difference for the multiple-choice tests. Surprisingly, the *t*-test

results indicated that the FonFS difference scores (M=6.51, SD=3.85) were significantly *lower* than the FonF difference scores (M=9.84, SD=5.07), $t(20)$=3.07, p=.01, r=.57. That is, the data from the multiple-choice pretest and posttest, which were administered eight months apart, suggested that controlled repetition did not improve the participants' long-term memory of lexical phrases at all. There is even a possibility that the controlled repetition tasks had a negative effect.

Table 4. ***Descriptive Statistics for the Multiple-Choice FonFS and FonF Scores***

			Pretest	Posttest	Posttest-Pretest
FonFS	*M*		50.20	56.71	6.51
	95%CI	Lower Bound	48.90	54.41	4.75
		Upper Bound	51.51	59.01	8.26
	SD		2.86	5.06	3.85
	Skewness		0.44	0.57	0.24
	SES		0.50	0.50	0.50
	Kurtosis		−0.42	1.13	1.73
	SEK		0.97	0.97	0.97
FonF	*M*		49.28	59.12	9.84
	95%CI	Lower Bound	47.71	56.40	7.53
		Upper Bound	50.85	61.85	12.16
	SD		3.44	5.99	5.07
	Skewness		−0.42	−0.37	0.48
	SES		0.50	0.50	0.50
	Kurtosis		−0.29	1.20	−0.17
	SEK		0.97	0.97	0.97

Note. N=21.

Table 5. ***Descriptive Statistics for the Translation FonFS and FonF Scores***

			Pretest	Posttest	Posttest-Pretest
FonFS	*M*		45.29	55.50	10.20
	95%CI	Lower Bound	44.32	53.75	8.78
		Upper Bound	46.27	57.25	11.63
	SD		2.31	4.14	3.37
	Skewness		−0.92	1.01	0.60
	SES		0.47	0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		−0.18	1.19	0.92
	SEK		0.92	0.91	0.92
FonF	*M*		42.58	55.20	12.63
	95%CI	Lower Bound	41.04	52.71	10.51
		Upper Bound	44.11	57.69	14.74
	SD		3.64	5.89	4.50
	Skewness		−1.13	0.80	0.15
	SES		0.47	0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		2.12	−0.04	−0.73
	SEK		0.92	0.92	0.92

Note. N=24.

Likewise, the translation pretest-posttest differences for FonFS and FonF lexical phrases were computed (see Table 5), and the two difference means were compared by administering a *t*-test. The result showed that the FonFS progress mean, or difference mean, (M=10.20, SD=3.37) was significantly lower than the FonF progress mean (M=12.63, SD=4.50), $t(23)=3.63$, $p=.001$, $r=.60$. That is, the data obtained from the translation pre- and posttests—more difficult than multiple-choice tests—also suggested that controlled repetition did not contribute to participants' long-term acquisition of lexical phrases in the least.

Results of Two-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA on Weekly Tests Scores

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics for the participants' weekly tests scores. The mean score on the multiple-choice weekly tests for the FonFS lexical phrases was 60.15 (SD=5.23), the FonF multiple-choice mean was 57.72 (SD=5.35), the FonFS translation mean was 48.21 (SD=3.42), and the FonF translation mean was 47.27 (SD=4.92). The FonFS means for both the multiple-choice and translation tests were higher than those for the FonF means. The multiple-choice means for both FonFS and FonF phrases were higher than the translation means for the same items.

Table 6. ***Descriptive Statistics for Weekly Test Results***

			FonFS	FonF
Multiple-Choice	*M*		60.15	57.72
	95%CI	Lower Bound	58.23	55.76
		Upper Bound	62.07	59.68
	SD		5.23	5.35
	Skewness		−0.01	0.44
	SES		0.42	0.42
	Kurtosis		−0.43	0.04
	SEK		0.82	0.82
Translation	*M*		48.21	47.27
	95%CI	Lower Bound	46.96	45.47
		Upper Bound	49.47	49.08
	SD		3.42	4.92
	Skewness		0.86	−0.32
	SES		0.42	0.42
	Kurtosis		0.6	0.36
	SEK		0.82	0.82

Note. N=31.

A two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to evaluate the effects of instructional treatment and test type on participants' short-term memory of lexical phrases based on the data from multiple-choice and translation weekly tests. The N-size was 31, and no outliers were present. The within-subjects factors were *treatment* with two levels (focus-on-form-and-formS and focus-on-form-only) and *test* with two levels (multiple-choice and

translation). The dependent variables were participants' multiple-choice and translation test scores for FonFS and FonF lexical phrases. The multivariate criteria of Pillai's Trace, Wilks's Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root were all identical (see Table 7). The treatment main effect was significant, $F(1, 30)=197.00$, $p=.00$, $\eta^2=.87$; the partial eta square value of .87 indicated that the factor accounts for 87% of the variance. The test main effect was significant, $F(1, 30)=5.47$, $p=.03$, $\eta^2=.15$. The treatment x test interaction was insignificant, $F(1, 30)=1.82$, $p=.19$, $\eta^2=.06$. Both treatment and test factors had only two levels each; thus, it was evident that the combined focus-on-form-and-formS instructional treatment was more effective than the focus-on-form-only treatment and that the participants performed better on the multiple-choice tests than on the translation tests.

The univariate test results were in accord with the multivariate test results (see Table 8). The main treatment effect was significant, $F(1, 30)=197.00$, $p=.00$, $\eta^2=.87$, the test main effect was significant, $F(1, 30)=5.47$, $p=.03$, $\eta^2=.15$, and the treatment x test interaction was insignificant, $F(1, 30)=1.82$, $p=.19$, $\eta^2=.06$. To sum up, the controlled oral repetition improved the participants' short-term memory of lexical phrases that they had learned through the reconstructive repetition and communicative language tasks.

Table 7. ***Multivariate Test Results of the Two-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA***

Effect		Value	*F*	*p*	η^2
Treatment	Pillai's Trace	0.87	197.00	0.00	0.87
	Wilks's Lambda	0.13	197.00	0.00	0.87
	Hotelling's Trace	6.57	197.00	0.00	0.87
	Roy's Largest Root	6.57	197.00	0.00	0.87
Test Type	Pillai's Trace	0.15	5.47	0.03	0.15
	Wilks's Lambda	0.85	5.47	0.03	0.15
	Hotelling's Trace	0.18	5.47	0.03	0.15
	Roy's Largest Root	0.18	5.47	0.03	0.15
Treatment x Test Type	Pillai's Trace	0.06	1.82	0.19	0.06
	Wilks's Lambda	0.94	1.82	0.19	0.06
	Hotelling's Trace	0.06	1.82	0.19	0.06
	Roy's Largest Root	0.06	1.82	0.19	0.06

Note. $df=1, 30, \alpha=.05$.

Table 8. ***Univariate Test Results of the Two-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA***

	SS	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Treatment	3883.04	3883.04	197.00	0.00	0.87
Residual	591.35	19.71			
Test Type	88.07	88.07	5.47	0.03	0.15
Residual	482.73	16.09			
Treatment x Test Type	17.29	17.29	1.82	0.19	0.06
Residual	285.75	9.52			

Note. $df=1, 30, \alpha=.05$.

Discussion

The first research question was: To what extent does the combination of focus-on-form and focus-on-formS instruction facilitate the participants' acquisition of lexical phrases? The results of *t*-tests that compared the pre- and posttest means provided evidence that the combined form-focused instruction, operationalized as controlled repetition and reconstructive repetition tasks contextualized in communicative EFL teaching, facilitated participants' acquisition of lexical phrases at a statistically significant level.

These findings resonate with Williams and Evans' (1998) and Muranoi's (2000) studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of multiple focus-on-form and focus-on-formS instructional treatments. One notable difference is that, whereas both Williams and Evans (whose target linguistic forms were participle and passive adjectives) and Muranoi (who focused on indefinite and definite articles) analyzed the acquisition of syntactic rules, the present study probed into the acquisition of exemplars (lexical phrases), which might be a minor contribution to the knowledge of form-focused instruction.

The second research question was: To what extent does the controlled oral repetition practice mediate the effectiveness of the contextualized, reconstructive focus-on-form repetition tasks? The results of the two-way repeated-measures ANOVA on weekly test results indicated that controlled oral repetition enhanced the participants' short-term memory of target phrases at a statistically significant level, which is in accord with my earlier study (Ogawa, 2011) that investigated the effects of oral repetition on the use of lexical phrases by a group of students who had just finished studying abroad. On the other hand, the *t*-tests results on the pretest and posttest scores showed that the controlled focus-on-formS repetition did not improve the participants' long-term memory of the learned phrases at all. The earlier study (Ogawa, 2011) also showed that oral repetition tasks had no significantly strong long-term effect on learners' use of lexical phrases but that the participants had, at least, attained higher scores after treatment although not at a significant level. In the present study, the participants' scores on focus-on-form-and-formS phrases were significantly *lower* than those on the focus-on-form-only phrases. This anomaly might be partly explained by the fact that the former study evaluated the effectiveness of oral cloze (i.e., reconstructive oral repetition) and mechanical repetition, as opposed to the communicative activities with no repetition practice at all. Thus, the results may be interpreted as partial evidence that the repetition practice that involves some low-level cognitive processing is somewhat effective but that the mechanical repetition per se plays no role in the acquisition of exemplars or can even have a negative effect on students' overall language learning.

Another possible explanation for the fact that the focus-on-form-and-formS treatment had a negative effect on the participants' long-term acquisition of lexical phrases is that the

intensity of, and the percentage of time spent on, the controlled repetition exercise was rather limited whereas participants engaged in so many different activities, including various communicative tasks after movie watching, and oral cloze repetition tasks. The focus-on-formS instruction for this study was based on Willis's (1990) proposal that "controlled practice [...] should be little and often" (p. 73), but, in retrospect, it is acknowledged that five or six oral repetitions for each target phrase might not have been frequent enough for long-term retention considering the amount of time that the participants spent on the other tasks.

Furthermore, in the present study, the participants were guided to repeat target phrases several times within the same lesson. Very few lexical phrases were presented repeatedly at different class sessions during the academic year. Karpicke and Roediger (Karpicke & Roediger, 2007; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006), who investigated testing effects, suggested that the opportunities for repeated retrieval of target linguistic forms are likely to result in long-term retention and that it is more effective to provide learners with chances to retrieve the target forms at reasonably long intervals. Thus, if some of the target lexical phrases are presented repeatedly over the experimental period, it might produce more decisive results.

There have been unfortunate incidents in the data collection and analysis process as well. Approximately half of the enrolled students were seniors, and many of them failed to attend classes regularly. Their irregular attendance might have hindered accurate statistical data collection and analysis in that those students did not consistently receive focus-on-form-and-formS or focus-on-form-only treatment. They might have missed chances to orally repeat some of the target lexical phrases. For follow-up studies in the future, the participants, or participant groups, must be chosen more selectively.

Another possible problem pertaining to the data collection was that all participants were advanced students. Paulston (1971), who argued for the constructive purpose of mechanical repetition, indicated that it was particularly useful for beginning learners to engage in mechanical repetition. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) also stated that verbatim memorization of useful lexical phrases might be effective especially at the beginning stages of language learning. From a psychological perspective, the participants who were advanced EFL learners and had very high academic proficiencies might not have been motivated to engage in mechanical repetition as strongly as beginning EFL learners, and the boredom that they experienced, a possible negative effect, might have been greater.

Yet another restriction was that the target lexical phrases included phrases that participants might have remembered by using a cognitive analysis strategy, instead of copying them as unanalyzed strings of words. This was technically inevitable because highly idiomatic expressions whose meanings can never be deduced from individual components are very rare when experimental treatments are administered to intact classes. However, it must

be acknowledged that participants might have learned some lexical phrases (particularly focus-on-form-only phrases) by means of cognitive strategies just as researchers who investigated the acquisition processes of collocations and idioms pointed out (Kennedy, 2003; Simpson & Mendis, 2003; Liu, 2010; Walker, 2011). The inclusion of semantically or syntactically transparent phrases might have affected the results of this study.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, the results of statistical analyses in the present study suggested that the combination of controlled repetition (focus-on-formS treatment) and reconstructive repetition (focus-on-form treatment), administered in communicative EFL activity contexts, facilitated participants' acquisition of lexical phrases to a statistically significant degree. However, the results also indicated that controlled repetition only enhanced the short-term retention of target phrases and did not contribute to long-term acquisition. There was room for improvement in research design, regarding the intensity and method of controlled oral repetition, but the general implication was that reconstructive repetition tasks are more practical for the acquisition of lexical phrases that are generally believed to be remembered and retrieved as unanalyzed wholes for in-class or real-life communication.

This study had several limitations. First, although the present study managed to compare participants' acquisition of pairs of lexical phrases that had approximately the same structures, the target phrases included collocations and idiomatic expressions whose meanings participants might have been able to deduce from individual components. They might not necessarily have tried to remember them using the noticing-and-memorizing strategy. Replication studies are needed to investigate how learners might learn lexical phrases that can only be remembered as unanalyzed chunks.

Second, I originally planned to conduct a delayed posttest to measure the carry-over effect. As the experiment lasted for one year, it had seemed technically possible to finish all the target movies a month before the end of the academic year and arrange another test. However, considering the fact that participants were somewhat fatigued after repeated tests, including the pre- and posttests and weekly tests, I decided to dispense with an additional posttest. One way to solve this problem is to simplify the overall testing system by including multiple-choice questions and partial-translation questions in each one test (for both pre- and posttests and weekly tests) and organize fewer test sessions.

Third, the original research plans included analyses of participants' speeches (oral presentations after group discussion) and essays. The results might have provided an insight into different aspects of the participants' acquisition of target phrases. However, various administrative restrictions prevented me from finishing the analyses of such oral and essay data.

Despite some negative data produced in this study, the controlled repetition practice still

has the potential to improve EFL learners' performance in certain areas: e. g., acquisition of long lexical phrases or correct pronunciation of target phrases. Useful information might be generated by conducting additional studies in which the functions of oral repetition tasks were more finely defined and examined from different angles.

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