

Title of Project:

Exploring differential collocational knowledge among native and non-native English speaking children

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Abstract:

Assessment of vocabulary in reading comprehension has tended to emphasize counting the number of words in a text an individual knows, or *vocabulary breadth* (Pearson, Heibert & Kamil, 2007). However, in order to process these lexical items effectively the learner must also have knowledge of grammatical functions, register, stylistic characteristics, appropriate contextual usage, idioms and collocations, or *vocabulary depth* (Milton, 2009). One area of vocabulary depth of increasing interest is the role multi-word phrases, *collocations*, play in language acquisition and language processing. For the purposes of the current study, a 'collocation' will be defined as a composite unit of words that expresses meaning as a whole and whose components co-occur more often than would be expected by chance (e.g. *take vs take place*). While it has been long established through corpus linguistic evidence that such multi-word items are ubiquitous in naturally-occurring discourse (Erman & Warren, 2000; Sinclair, 1991), and that such items can negatively affect the reading comprehension of adult L2 learners of English (Bishop, 2004; Martinez & Murphy, 2011), at present the nature of collocational knowledge in young learners and its possible correlates with literacy remain relatively under-explored, largely because there are no available measures appropriate for use with children. The current study will create and validate a measure of a verb + noun collocation knowledge appropriate for use native and non-native British English speaking children between 7 and 10 years old. The instrument will be validated with monolingual English speaking children and English as an Additional Language learners (EAL) enrolled in British schooling. This research will seek to demonstrate that the test yields reliable test scores, shows evidence of internal consistency and concurrent validity, and that it discriminates well between learners at different ages, as well as between native English speakers and EAL learners. Correlations with other measures of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension will also be explored.