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No Silver Bullet: L2 Collocation Instruction in an Advanced Spanish Classroom

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Many contemporary second language (L2) instructional materials feature collocation exercises; however, few studies have verified their effectiveness (Boers, Demecheleer, Coxhead, & Webb, 2014) or whether these exercises can be utilized for target languages beyond English (Higueras García, 2017). This study addresses these issues by investigating whether Laufer and Girsai's (2008) instructional protocol of contrastive analysis and translation (CAT) is effective for teaching collocations in an advanced Spanish course. 25 collocations were selected from course readings. A CAT group completed collocation workshops following Laufer and Girsai's protocol. A control group encountered the target collocations in course texts but received no explicit collocation instruction. A third group received form-focused instruction (FFI) consisting of non-contrastive vocabulary exercises. Results indicated that both CAT and FFI groups demonstrated significantly increased collocation knowledge, whereas the control group learned very few target collocations. Differences in learning gains between the CAT and FFI groups were not significant. These results suggest that (a) any exercise that leads students to cognitively engage with the forms and meanings of targeted collocations will lead to their acquisition, and that (b) without some form of explicit instruction, most students will not independently acquire collocations in an advanced language course.

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INTRODUCTION

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has suggested that second language (L2) learners have much to gain from mastering formulaic sequences (FSs or formulae) (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Henriksen, 2012; Meunier, 2012); these benefits include greater accuracy, increased fluency (Wray, 2002), and the ability to produce more native-like speech and writing (Higueras García, 2017). Unfortunately, FSs are acquired slowly, if at all, and studies have shown that advanced learners have difficulty using FSs appropriately and idiomatically (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Chen, 2011; Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Henriksen, 2012; Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005; Zyzik, 2010), even after extended study and L2 immersion (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). Many of these more experienced students work hard to master the morphosyntactic aspects of their target language's grammar, only to later discover that they must also learn its lexical grammar, i.e., the irregular and seemingly [1] arbitrary word combinations that have become conventionalized and preferred by native speakers.

   Collocations (e.g., *black coffee*, *tall building*, *to make sense*, *to save time*) are one important type

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[1] Boers & Lindstromberg (2009) have demonstrated that many formulaic sequences are motivated by a variety of factors, such as sound repetition (*wear and tear*) or conceptual metaphors (*blowing off steam* instantiating the concept of ANGER IS HEAT). Of course, to the L2 learner these motivations are often not apparent, making the lexical and syntactic restrictions (*have a dream,* not **make a dream*) that make FSs idiomatic seem quite arbitrary, irregular, and thus difficult to learn at a systematic level.

of FS that has received increased attention in recent years (e.g., Chen, 2011; Gyllstad & Wolter, 2016; Henriksen, 2012; Pérez Serrano, 2015; Torner Castels & Bernal, 2017). In the context of instructed L2 learning, it has been argued that studying collocations is a worthwhile activity with many potential benefits for advanced L2 learners (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005). Previous research has proposed a wide variety of learning activities and other instructional interventions aimed at accelerating the pace of collocation learning in language courses (see Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). However, despite increased interest in this area of instructed SLA research, Higueras García (2017) notes that currently "much work is necessary before we can say that collocations are fully incorporated in Foreign Language Teaching" (p. 250). She notes that twenty years after the publication of Lewis' (1993) *The Lexical Approach*—perhaps the best-known method for teaching collocations and other FSs in L2 courses—its influence "is limited to some proposals as to how to present and practice collocations in textbooks" (Higueras García, 2017, p. 250).

To better integrate the findings of L2 collocation research into the domain of second language teaching, several questions must be addressed. Naturally, an important preliminary consideration is whether any time at all should be spent teaching collocations, considering that instructional time is so limited and instructors have so many other topics to cover. If it can be shown that students acquire collocations as a byproduct of completing meaning-focused communicative activities, such as reading authentic texts, then precious class time need not be dedicated to collocation instruction. On the other hand, if L2 students do not learn collocations on their own, then it can be argued that collocations should be more explicitly taught and integrated into L2 curricula. If this is the case, then a second issue concerns which of the many collocation learning activities proposed in the literature are actually effective for enhancing students' collocation knowledge. Boers, Demecheleer, Coxhead, and Webb (2014) and Higueras García (2017) have both pointed out that few studies have empirically evaluated the effectiveness of the collocation exercises featured in contemporary instructional materials. Furthermore, Boers et al. (2014) found evidence suggesting that some of these exercises might not only be ineffective but also counterproductive, because they may lead students to learn infelicitous word combinations such as *do a deep breath. All of this suggests that the many activities proposed in the literature should be empirically evaluated before they are integrated into instructional materials and used in language courses.

A third limitation of current knowledge is that previous studies have almost exclusively used English as a Second Language (ESL) learners as study participants. With a few exceptions (e.g., Pérez Serrano, 2015; Romero Doiz, 2014; Stengers, Boers, Housen, & Eyckmans, 2011), relatively few studies have investigated collocation learning in other target languages beyond English. Given the lack of diversity in target languages studied, more non-ESL based research is needed to broaden the scope of current knowledge of L2 collocation instruction.

The present study aims to shed light on the issues described above so that knowledge regarding L2 collocation learning can be better integrated into the L2 Spanish curriculum. First, we measure the extent to which 25 verb-noun collocations are acquired from the assigned course readings of an advanced Spanish course in the absence of explicit collocation instruction. We begin to address the second and third issues by empirically evaluating the effectiveness of Contrastive Analysis & Translation (CAT), an instructional method that has led to successful collocation learning in an ESL classroom (Laufer & Girsai, 2008) and may also prove effective in L2 Spanish courses. In the current study, instructional

effectiveness is measured by comparing the learning gains of a CAT treatment group to those of a control group, as well as to those from a third treatment group which received non-contrastive form-focused instruction (FFI). We hypothesize that without some form of explicit instruction, students are unlikely to learn collocations on their own from reading authentic texts in advanced language courses. Based on our findings, we will argue that there is no 'silver bullet' for effective collocation instruction—any type of form-focused instruction which draws attention to the forms and meanings of targeted collocations is likely sufficient for facilitating the acquisition of these lexical items. Additionally, we argue that more conventional vocabulary exercises may be best for teaching collocations because they can be more easily integrated into contemporary L2 courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Collocations

Just as the term formulaic sequence has been defined and operationalized in a variety of disparate and sometimes contradictory manners (see also Wood, 2015, pp. 35–52), defining the concept of collocation with clarity and consistency has been a thorny and recurring issue in the field of formulaic language. In the current study, the term collocation is used in a phraseological rather than a frequency-based sense (see Henriksen, 2012, pp. 30–31). One phraseology-based typology that has been used to define collocations and to distinguish them from other types of multiword sequences is that of Nesselhauf (2003), which classifies verb-noun sequences[2] into three categories: free combinations, idioms, and collocations. Free combinations are not formulaic sequences. Though some may be highly frequent (e.g., *drink water*), they lack the grammatical and syntactic restrictions that make collocations and idioms conventionalized and formulaic. Next, idioms feature grammatical and semantic restrictions that render them far less flexible than free combinations. For example, it is possible to wish a performer good luck using the idiom *break a leg*, but it is not possible to wish good luck to multiple performers using *break your legs,* nor do native English speakers often tell performers to *break an appendage* before a show. Finally, collocations lie between idioms and free combinations in terms of restrictedness: while they allow for a greater degree of morphological and syntactic flexibility than idioms (e.g., *make/making/made + (good/little/lots of/etc.) + progress*), they feature lexical restrictions that extend beyond those of free combinations (e.g., *create progress, *do progress).

Factors Influencing L2 Collocation Learning

Several factors have been proposed to account for the slow learning rates of formulaic sequences overall. Two such factors are fundamental differences between L1 learners' and L2 learners' lexical acquisition processes (Wray, 2002), and the "word-focused" approach that many students and instructors take with regards to L2 vocabulary (Henriksen, 2012, p. 40), in which learning new words is prioritized over acquiring new phrases. This subsection focuses more specifically on two qualities of collocations that affect their acquisition by L2

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[2] Nesselhauf (2003, p. 225) notes this classification scheme is limited to verb-noun sequences, but also argues that it could be modified to suit other grammatical categories of word sequences (e.g., noun-adjective sequences) without major modification.

learners: the low frequencies of many individual collocations and their low degree of saliency.

The low frequencies of many individual collocations may partially explain why they are not acquired even by more advanced learners who have had extensive exposure to L2 input. On one hand, corpus studies have shown that collocations and other formulae make up a considerable portion of language, especially in spoken discourse (Shin & Nation, 2008). On the other hand, many individual collocations occur very infrequently, especially in written discourse (Webb, Newton, & Chang, 2013). Vocabulary research indicates that individual words must be encountered at least six times before learning can occur (Zahar, Cobb, & Spada, 2001). This frequency threshold creates a lexical acquisition obstacle for intermediate and advanced L2 students: learning more advanced words becomes increasingly difficult as they occur less and less frequently, which reduces the likelihood that these lexical items will be incidentally acquired while reading authentic texts (Cobb, 2007). It has been shown that collocation knowledge is acquired at a similar rate to that of individual word knowledge (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2015), and so it is also likely that many individual collocations will not be encountered frequently enough to be incidentally acquired. If this is the case, then some form of instructional intervention is necessary to accelerate the acquisition process for all but the most frequent collocations in a target language.

A second factor that may influence the acquisition of collocations is their saliency, that is, the likelihood that they will be noticed by students during comprehension activities such as reading authentic texts. It has been claimed that collocations are relatively transparent and that their meanings can be understood by L2 learners so long as students are familiar with the phrases' constituent words (Laufer & Waldman, 2011). More specifically, many verb-noun collocations (e.g., *have a drink*, *do the dishes*) seem to be especially problematic due to their semantic transparency (Boers et al., 2014). The fact that many verb-noun collocations feature high-frequency words that are likely already known by more advanced learners (e.g., *give + in*), and that their verb constituents are often semantically "light" (e.g., _make a mistake_, _do my homework_) reduces the likelihood that L2 learners will realize that these sequences are recurring in conventionalized chunks that often preclude linguistic creativity and lexical substitution (e.g., *_do a mistake_, *_make my homework_). Thus, if we accept Schmidt's (1994) hypothesis that noticing is the "necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake for learning" (p. 17), collocations are likely not acquired because their low saliency causes students to overlook them during input processing. In this sense, the transparency of collocations is a sort of double-edged sword in that students can easily comprehend these phrases, yet as a result fail to produce them with the correct target-like forms (e.g., *Last night I *made a dream*). Accordingly, their low saliency blocks their integration into the L2 lexicon. Again, instructional intervention seems to be necessary in these cases.

Fostering Collocation Learning in L2 Courses

Implicit Approaches

A wide variety of techniques have been proposed for teaching collocations and other FSs in second language courses. These techniques can be divided into two broad categories: (1) those that aim to enhance the rates of acquisition through independent learning outside the classroom, and (2) more focused techniques that teach a set of targeted collocations. Many of the former methods can be described as awareness-raising techniques because they aim to

raise students' overall awareness of the ubiquity of collocations and other formulae in the target language (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). Perhaps the best-known awareness-raising method is Lewis' Lexical Approach (LA) (1993, 1997), which claims that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar" (1993, p. 34). A key learning activity within the LA is "chunking," in which students read authentic texts and underline any word strings that they consider formulaic. Experimental studies examining chunking's effectiveness have produced unclear or mixed results (e.g., Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, & Demecheleer, 2006; Jones & Haywood, 2004). For instance, in one study no significant differences were found between chunking and control groups (Stengers, Boers, Houson, & Eyckmans, 2010), while in another study many L2 participants often underlined phrases that were not considered formulaic by native speakers (Eyckmans, Boers, & Stengers, 2007). These findings seem to corroborate observations made by Boers & Lindstromberg (2012) that there is "little evidence…to suggest that merely raising learners' awareness about formulaic sequences is a particularly powerful accelerator" (p. 99).

Like chunking, input flooding can also be described as indirect intervention in that students' attention is not explicitly drawn to a set of targeted sequences. Here, written input is flooded so that individual collocations occur repeatedly in a relatively short stretch of text in hopes of inducing incidental learning. While some studies have indicated that input flooding can result in the incidental acquisition of collocations, overall findings are mixed and inconclusive. Perhaps the most successful example of collocation learning via input flooding is Webb, Newton, and Chang (2013), who examined how input frequency affected the incidental learning of 18 verb-noun collocations (e.g., *lose touch*) by Taiwanese ESL students. Four groups read and listened to different versions of a graded reader that varied the frequencies (1, 5, 10, and 15 repetitions) of the target collocations, and then completed tests measuring their knowledge of the forms and meanings of the target collocations. Overall, increased frequency of exposure was associated with greater test performance, leading the researchers to conclude that incidental collocation acquisition can occur if they appear 15 times within a graded reader. On the other hand, their results suggest that collocations that are not encountered on multiple occasions are unlikely to be incidentally acquired: no significant differences were found between the single-exposure group and a zero-exposure control group. Moreover, little learning of the forms of the target collocations occurred in groups receiving fewer than five exposures.

Other studies have yielded less promising results regarding input flooding of collocations. Within a larger study comparing the effects of explicit instruction to incidental acquisition on collocation learning, Szudarski (2012) exposed participants to a set of target collocations six times during classroom reading activities over a three-week period. While the incidental learning group demonstrated significant learning gains on tests of verb form recall and verb form recognition, overall the learning gains were not significantly different from those made by a control group, and Szudarski concluded that input flooding alone did not lead to much incidental learning. Finally, a recent study by Pellicer-Sánchez (2015) provides some tentative evidence to suggest that incidental learning of collocations can occur. ESL participants read a story containing six target adjective-noun collocations that were repeated four or eight times. One week later, tests of the form and meaning of the collocations indicated significant gains for both groups, suggesting that four exposures may be sufficient for incidental collocation acquisition. However, the findings of this study must be interpreted with caution as it used "pseudowords" as a substitute for real English nouns in the target phrases. It is possible that the targeted 'pseudocollocations' were more salient to participants because they

invariably featured novel words, and thus these test items do not seem comparable to genuine collocations which often feature familiar, high-frequency words (e.g., *have + dream*) and thus are likely less salient.

Overall these findings suggest that input flooding might induce some degree of incidental collocation learning, but only if certain conditions are met: students must encounter the same collocation on several occasions and within a short span of text. Additionally, as an instructional intervention, input flooding may be at odds with more advanced language courses based on a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework, which tend to feature authentic texts that may not be as easily modified—or 'flooded'—as the texts of more basic language courses. For these classrooms, more explicit interventions may be necessary if students are to acquire the collocations that they encounter in written input.

Explicit Approaches

Beyond the more implicit methods reviewed above, other approaches have been proposed to teach L2 collocations and other formulaic sequences. These methods can be described as explicit because students are instructed to commit specific formulae to memory, and are assisted in doing so by engaging in a variety of learning activities. Many of these methods make use of mnemonic exercises aimed at helping students better retain the target collocations in long-term memory, such as activities in which students connect the constituent words of verb-noun collocations (Boers et al., 2014), apply cognitive semantics to learn the origins of figurative metaphors (Beréndi, Csábi, & Kövecses, 2008; Boers, 2000; Li, 2009), or complete dictation activities that highlight the alliterative nature of many formulae (e.g., *safe and sound*, Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008). In general, these studies appear to lead to more robust rates of learning as compared to the more indirect approaches reviewed above (see Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012).

One form of explicit collocation instruction that has yielded positive results in the context of ESL learning is Contrastive Analysis and Translation. To evaluate the effectiveness of contrastive analysis as a technique for learning new L2 vocabulary, Laufer and Girsai (2008) measured ESL students' knowledge of ten novel words and ten novel collocations. Participants were divided into three groups receiving different instructional treatments: Meaning-Focused Instruction (MFI), Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), and Contrastive Analysis and Translation (CAT). The MFI group completed a set of communicative tasks that featured the target items but did not explicitly draw attention to them. The FFI group completed two conventional vocabulary exercises—a recognition task in which learners identified the meanings of target items (e.g., *hit the headlines*), and then a sentence completion task using the target items. The CAT group also completed vocabulary exercises, but their attention was drawn to the formal differences between the target items and their L1 equivalents through a series of translation and contrastive analysis tasks. First, they were given L2 sentences featuring the target items; their task was to translate the target vocabulary from L2 to L1. After these translations were collected, students were given the same sentences to translate, this time from L1 to L2. Finally, after reviewing the students' answers as a group, the instructor gave the class "a brief explicit contrastive instruction" (Laufer & Girsai, 2008, p. 705) in which students' attention was directed to the differences between the L1 and L2 collocations—for example, that students' L1 equivalent for the English collocation *meet expectations* should not be directly translated from Hebrew (~ "answer expectations"). Immediately afterwards all groups completed two vocabulary knowledge

tests, and delayed recall tests were administered one week later.

Results indicated that the CAT group significantly outperformed both the MFI and the FFI groups on all tests. The MFI group seemed to have learned almost none of the test items, suggesting that little incidental acquisition of the target items occurred, either during the initial treatment or afterwards, during the week preceding the delayed posttests. Importantly, results indicated that the CAT group significantly outscored the FFI group on all tests, suggesting that contrastive analysis tasks may be significantly more effective for teaching collocations as compared to non-contrastive vocabulary tasks. Laufer and Girsai account for the significant gains described above by invoking Schmidt's (1994) noticing hypothesis and Swain's (1985) output hypothesis. They claim that in the CAT treatment group, noticing and awareness-raising was achieved by making the target vocabulary more salient "by providing contrastive association with the corresponding L1 item" (p. 697). Furthermore, they claim that the translation task resulted in pushed output by forcing students to produce "problematic words or structures" (p. 698), such as non-congruent English collocations, that students otherwise may have avoided.

Research Questions

The current study examines whether Laufer and Girsai's (2008) CAT treatment can be applied to teach L2 collocations in a non-ESL context, that is, in an advanced Spanish course. Additionally, it investigates whether CAT is more effective than non-contrastive vocabulary exercises for Spanish collocation instruction. It does this by measuring the gains of a third treatment group, which completed a non-contrastive collocation learning protocol. Finally, this study measures the extent to which students independently learn collocations in a conventional L2 Spanish course, that is, in one that does not feature form-focused collocation instruction. The following research questions (RQs) address these issues:

RQ1: In the absence of any explicit collocation instruction, to what extent do L2 students acquire verb-noun collocations from reading authentic texts in an advanced Spanish course?

RQ2: Are the instructional treatments of CAT and non-contrastive FFI effective at fostering the learning of L2 verb-noun collocations in an advanced Spanish course?

RQ3: Does the contrastive nature of the CAT protocol lead to the acquisition of significantly more L2 collocations as compared to the non-contrastive FFI treatment?

METHODS

Participants

Study participants were 43 undergraduate students enrolled in a third-year Spanish course at a large public research university in the United States. Students were estimated to be near the Intermediate High or Advanced Low proficiency levels (or the B1 and B2 levels using the Common European Framework); most had previously completed several years of Spanish coursework, and several had previously studied or lived abroad in Spanish-speaking countries. The course featured in this study aims to develop students' Spanish-language

academic writing skills; coursework consists of reading authentic texts (e.g., short stories, plays, essays) and writing essays analyzing themes in the texts such as cultural assimilation. This format means that students have many opportunities to encounter and use written collocations throughout the course. Research participants were divided into one control group and two experimental groups. The control group consisted of two course sections not taught by the researcher, whereas treatment group participants were enrolled in course sections taught by the researcher during different academic terms. Many students enrolled in the course were heritage or native speakers of Spanish; however, because this study's scope was limited to collocation learning by L2 learners, these students' data are not included here.

Target Collocations and Test Format

25 Spanish verb-noun collocations were selected as test items (see Appendix A) from the assigned course readings, and thus would be encountered by all groups. Most items occurred only once, although 4 appeared twice (*quedar claro*, *dar paso a*, *dar a luz*, *guardar silencio*), and the item *darse cuenta* (*to realize*) was much more frequent, appearing a total of 29 times.

The pretest and posttest used a multiple choice, sentence completion format. Each question tested knowledge of one target collocation; participants completed a sentence by selecting the correct phrase from four possible choices. The test responses were scored as being either correct or incorrect, allowing for a maximum total score of 25 points. To reduce the likelihood that the correct option would be selected by chance, students were instructed to choose the option *No lo sé* (~ "I don't know") when unable to make an educated guess. Below is a sample question:

1. Es buena idea prohibir la distribución de bolsas de plástico en nuestra ciudad. Esta ley nos ayuda a mejor _____ de nuestro impacto en el planeta.
   a. tomar conciencia
   b. tener cuidado
   c. dar conciencia
   d. ser cuidadosos
   e. No lo sé

The test format measured participants' general knowledge of the target collocations. While some researchers have designed assessments testing specific components of collocational knowledge, such as receptive knowledge (Gyllstad, 2009) or productive knowledge (Revier, 2009), this format was chosen due to its use in a previous Spanish classroom collocation study (Pérez Serrano, 2015), and because it could be quickly administered to multiple course sections and easily graded.

The pretest and posttest were administered during first and final weeks of the ten-week academic quarter. The tests were identical in terms of content; however, the order of the questions and the answer choices were randomized to reduce any learning effects. Before administering the pretest, it was first piloted with two native speakers of Spanish to ensure that all sentences used the target collocations appropriately and idiomatically, and that each question had only one correct and idiomatic answer.

Test Groups

This study's test groups consisted of three treatment groups. The control group was exposed to the target collocations by reading the assigned course texts, but it received no explicit instruction regarding the forms or the meanings of these items during class, nor did it receive any class instruction regarding collocations or other types of formulaic sequences. By contrast, after the pretest both experimental groups received a brief presentation on Spanish collocations. During this initial training, students also received a list of the 25 target collocations along with their locations in the assigned course readings. Students were told that they were responsible for studying the collocations outside of class, as they would appear on course examinations.

After this introductory session, the two experimental groups received two forms of collocation instruction that were similar to the treatments featured in Laufer and Girsai (2008). Both treatment groups completed the training over the course of five 50-minute workshops, which took place weekly or biweekly in a computer lab. The two treatments are detailed below.

During each Friday workshop, students in the Contrastive Analysis and Translation (CAT) group studied 5-8 previously selected collocations that had appeared in the assigned readings for the week. The CAT protocol consisted of three tasks. The first aimed at teaching the meanings of each collocation, as well as a sense of the contexts in which each is used, for instance, that *llevar a cabo* (~ "to carry out [a study]") is generally used in more formal registers of Spanish. For this first exercise, students were presented with the reading passages in which the target collocations appeared; the students worked in pairs and used context clues to guess each collocation's meaning. To check their work, the pairs were instructed to use Linguee, an online dictionary that allows lookups of both individual words and phrases across several languages. After completing this first task in pairs, the class reconvened and reviewed the meanings of each collocation together. Next, students completed a contrastive analysis activity. The goal for this second activity was to draw students' attention to the form of each Spanish collocation, and to become aware of the lexical and syntactic differences between the collocations and their English equivalents. Here students completed a congruency table, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Congruency Table for perder la razón (Student work is highlighted.)

1. Perder la razón		
This phrase means:	**This phrase translates directly into English as:**	**Congruent? Explain.**
To lose your mind	To lose the reason	Not quite, "la razón" has a different meaning

Each congruency table had three steps and was completed from left to right. The second row of Table 1 shows an example of the participant VL's classwork. For the first step, students wrote an English equivalent for the target phrase. Here VL wrote "to lose your

mind." For the second step, students translated the target collocation from Spanish to English in a literal, word-for-word manner. Here VL directly translated *perder la razón* as "to lose the reason." Finally, students compared their work from steps one and two. By comparing the two sequences, they could determine whether the target collocation and its English equivalent were congruent. For this third step, students were instructed to record any personal observations they could make regarding the differences between the two phrases. In this case, VL wrote that "'la razón' has a different meaning," which is correct: in the collocation *perder la razón*, the polysemous noun "la razón" refers to one's sanity or mental faculties; it cannot be interpreted as "the reason," e.g., *the reason for my decision*. After completing this contrastive analysis exercise in pairs, the whole class reconvened and discussed its work. As in Laufer and Girsai (2008), during this time the instructor also attempted to raise students' awareness of the formal differences between L2 collocations and their L1 equivalents by pointing out common errors made by L2 Spanish students, for example, reminding students about the polysemous nature of many individual Spanish words (e.g., *razón*).

The third and final portion of the protocol reinforced what students had learned in the first two activities. Designed as a practice quiz, students were instructed to put away their notes and independently complete a sentence completion exercise featuring the collocations covered in the workshop. After completing this practice quiz, the class reviewed their answers together. The entire workshop took about 30 minutes. Appendix B presents an abridged version of this protocol using VL's completed classwork.

Students in the second treatment group received non-contrastive Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), which focused on the forms of the target collocations but did not draw attention to the formal differences between these items and their English equivalents. This treatment was similar to the CAT treatment in some ways: the FFI group completed the first and third exercises of the CAT protocol (i.e., determining the meaning of the collocation and the sentence-completion practice quiz); however, it did not complete the second contrastive analysis task described above. Instead, for their second task, FFI students worked in pairs to write L2 sentences that used each of the 5-8 collocations targeted in that training session. After writing these sentences, the class reconvened and students shared their sentences as a group. This second exercise can be described as non-contrastive, because students' attention was not drawn to the formal differences between the Spanish collocations and their English equivalents (e.g., *to make sense* vs. *tener sentido*, not *hacer sentido); and it can also be described as form-focused, because students were corrected if they incorrectly produced the target collocations (e.g., *llevar a cabo*, not *llevar al cabo). Like the CAT group, completing the entire workshop took about 30 minutes.

RESULTS

This study's first research question (RQ1) asked whether the target collocations would be acquired by the control group, which received no explicit collocation instruction but encountered the target items in the assigned course texts. The Control Group's pretest average (10.58, SD = 1.56) and posttest average (11.42, SD = 2.81) suggests that overall little collocation learning occurred over the course of the quarter. While there was no significant collocation learning overall, it is still possible that control group participants may have acquired one or more of the individual target collocations. To determine whether this occurred, the control group's percentage of correct responses for each individual item on the

pretest and posttest was calculated, as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentage of Control Group's Correct Responses for Each Item

Collocation	Pretest %	Posttest %	% Change	p-value
darse cuenta	91.67	100	8.33	0.34
tener sentido	83.33	91.67	8.34	0.59
llegar a tiempo	100	91.67	-8.33	0.34
estar de acuerdo	83.33	83.33	0	N/A
quedar claro	58.33	75	16.67	0.35
llamar la atención	58.33	66.67	8.34	0.59
sacar la basura	100	66.67	-33.33	0.039
echarse a perder	58.33	58.33	0	N/A
ser cosa de meses	25	50	25	0.08
estar a punto de	33.33	50	16.67	0.167
dar paso a	58.33	50	-8.33	0.59
dar a luz	25	41.67	16.67	0.17
hacer una pregunta	33.33	41.67	8.34	0.34
poner fin a	41.67	41.67	0	N/A
causar estragos	50	41.67	-8.33	0.34
llevar a cabo	8.33	33.33	25	0.08
poner en jaque	41.67	33.33	-8.34	0.67
perder la razón	16.67	25	8.33	0.34
hacer caso	25	25	0	N/A
dar a conocer	0	16.67	16.67	0.17
poner al día	8.33	16.67	8.34	0.59
guardar silencio	25	16.67	-8.33	0.59
tomar conciencia	25	16.67	-8.33	0.67
salvar su propio pellejo	8.33	8.33	0	N/A
pedir la palabra	0	0	0	N/A

Table 2 indicates that control participants showed an increased knowledge of 12 of the 25 items on the posttest, such as *darse cuenta* and *llegar a tiempo*. By contrast, posttest scores were lower for 7 of the 25 collocations (e.g., *dar paso a*), and for 6 items participants exhibited no change in test performance (e.g., *hacer caso*). To examine the statistical significance of these results, paired t-tests were performed for each test item; their p-values are displayed in the rightmost column of Table 2. None of the changes in test averages indicated any statistical significance, except for *sacar la basura* (~ "to take out the trash"), in which students demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in their knowledge of this collocation.

Overall, these results seem to confirm that little or no learning of the target collocations occurred.

Next, with regard to the instruction interventions studied, the second RQ asked whether the CAT and FFI treatments were effective at teaching the targeted verb-noun collocations, as measured by increases in posttest scores. Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) of the pretests and posttests from the three study groups, which are also illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Table 3
Mean Scores and SDs for Six Test Conditions, out of 25 Total Points

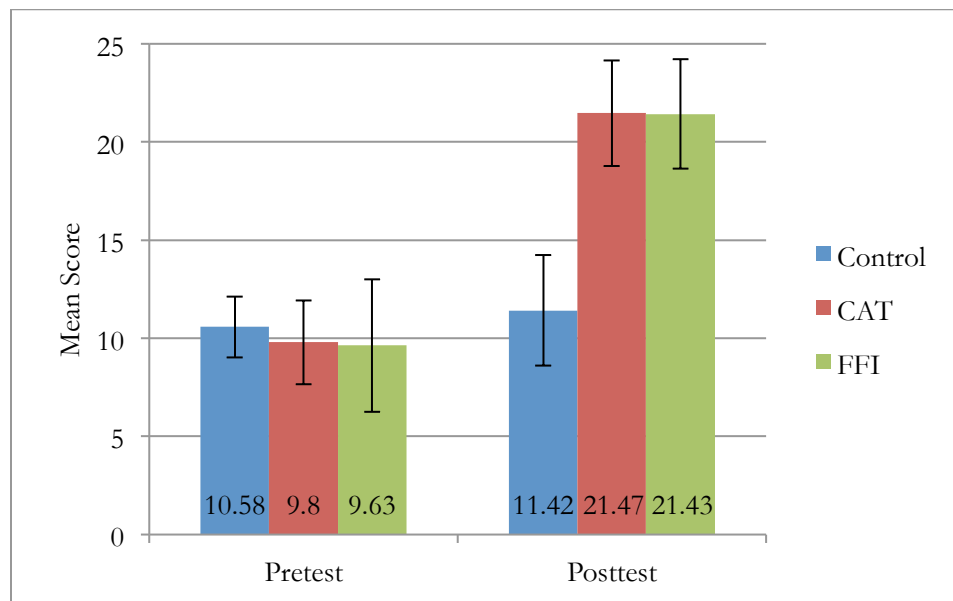| Group	Pretest	SD	Posttest	SD
Control **N = 12**	10.58	1.56	11.42	2.81
CAT **N = 15**	9.8	2.14	21.47	2.69
FFI **N = 16**	9.63	3.38	21.43	2.80

Figure 1. Mean Test Scores for Treatment and Control Groups.

To analyze the statistical significance of these results, the data were subjected to a repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) having three levels of treatment (control, CAT, FFI) and two levels of testing period (pretest, posttest). All effects were statistically significant at the .05 significance level. The main effect of treatment yielded an *F* ratio of $F_{(2,40)} = 17.98$, *p* < .001, indicating that the two treatment groups significantly outperformed the control group. The main effect of test period yielded an *F* ratio of $F_{(1, 40)} = 392.58$, *p* < .001, indicating that overall the three groups combined improved from the pretest to the posttest. Finally, the interaction effect between treatment and testing period was significant, $F_{(2,40)} = 62.13$, *p* < .001, indicating that the effect of testing period was

significantly greater for the treatment groups (the CAT and FFI groups) as compared to the control group. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
ANOVA of Pretest and Posttest Data

Effect	DFn	DFd	F	p-value
Treatment	2	40	17.98	<.001
Testing Period	1	40	392.58	<.001
Treatment*Period	2	40	62.13	<.001

Given these significant results, a series of t-tests was conducted to make more specific comparisons between the different test conditions. These tests used the Bonferroni Correction to reduce the possibility of Type I error, adjusting alpha to 0.0056 (0.05 divided by 9 individual t-tests). Test results appear below in Table 5.

Table 5
*Multiple Comparisons T-tests. * indicates significance at α = 0.0056*

Test	Comparison		t	DF	p-value
	Groups(s)	Test Period(s)			
1	Control:CAT	Pre	1.10	24.83	0.28
2	Control:FFI	Pre	1.00	22.30	0.33
3	CAT:FFI	Pre	0.17	25.58	0.86
4	CAT	Post:Pre	13.93	14	<.001*
5	FFI	Post:Pre	16.96	15	<.001*
6	Control	Post:Pre	1.16	11	0.27
7	Control:CAT	Post	-9.40	23.25	<.001*
8	Control:FFI	Post	-9.35	23.82	<.001*
9	CAT:FFI	Post	0.03	28.98	0.98

The first three tests are non-paired t-tests and compare the performance of the three treatment groups on the pretest. These analyses help to determine whether the three groups began the study with comparable levels of knowledge of the 25 targeted collocations. Tests 4 through 6 are paired and measure the learning gains of each group by comparing its posttest and pretest scores. Finally, Tests 7 through 9 are non-paired and compare the performance of the three groups on the posttest.

On the pretest, the three treatment groups produced similar scores, with average percentages of 10.58 (Control), 9.8 (CAT), and 9.63 (FFI) out of a total possible score of 25 points. The control group's average score of 10.58 was slightly higher than that of the CAT group (9.8) and the FFI group (9.63); however, the lack of statistical significance in any of the first three t-tests suggests that the three groups had comparable initial levels of knowledge of the target collocations.

The next triad of tests (Tests 4 through 6) indicates that significant learning of the target items took place in the CAT and FFI groups but not in the control group. The CAT group's average percentage increased from 39.20% to 85.88% and the FFI group's average increased

from 38.52% to 85.72%; Tests 4 and 5 indicated that these gains were statistically significant. By contrast, the control group's average percentage increased only slightly, from 42.33% to 45.68% and the pretest and posttest averages were not statistically significant (see Test 6). This result also partially addresses RQ 1, as it suggests that overall the control group did not incidentally acquire the target collocations over the course of the ten-week quarter.

The final three tests indicate significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group on the posttest. The average posttest scores of the CAT Group (21.47) and the FFI Group (21.43) were both significantly higher than that of the control group (11.42, see Tests 7 and 8). On the other hand, the posttest averages of the CAT and FFI Groups were nearly the same, and Test 9 indicated no statistical significance between these two averages. This result addresses RQ 3, indicating that both instructional treatments were equally effective at teaching the 25 targeted verb-noun collocations.

DISCUSSION

This study's first RQ measured the extent to which advanced L2 students learn collocations in a language course in the absence of explicit collocation instruction. This question was addressed by comparing the pretest and posttest scores of the control group, which encountered the target collocations in the assigned texts but did not receive instruction that drew attention to these lexical items. While the control group's posttest mean score was slightly higher than its pretest score (11.42 vs. 10.58), this increase was not statistically significant. This lack of growth was likely influenced by the low frequencies of the target items. The control participants probably did not encounter these collocations frequently enough to learn them, let alone to notice them, as most occurred only once or twice in the readings. This corroborates findings of previous studies on incidental collocation acquisition. Webb, Newton, and Chang (2013) also found little difference in test knowledge between the single-exposure and zero-exposure groups, and noted that more than 5 encounters were necessary for effective learning of form of collocations. Similarly, while Pellicer-Sánchez (2015) concluded that "collocational knowledge can be learnt incidentally from reading" (p. 1), her experimental groups were exposed to each target collocation at least four times. By contrast, in the current study only one collocation (i.e., *darse cuenta*) occurred more than twice in the course readings. Not surprisingly, 91.67% of control participants demonstrated knowledge of this collocation on the pretest, and 100% of control participants demonstrated knowledge on the posttest. Of course, these results do not mean that collocations cannot be incidentally acquired in an L2 course, but rather that most collocations occur so infrequently in authentic texts that without instructional intervention, only the most frequent collocations (e.g., *darse cuenta*) will likely be acquired.

RQ2 examined whether two different methods of collocation instruction— Contrastive Analysis and Translation (CAT) and non-contrastive Form-Focused (FFI)—were effective at teaching collocations in an advanced Spanish course, as measured by comparing pretest and posttest performance on a general assessment of collocation knowledge. The results presented above indicate that both instructional treatments led to significant increases in students' general knowledge of the target items. The CAT group increased its average percentage from 39.2% to 85.88%, and the FFI group increased its mean percentage from 38.52% to 85.72%.

Perhaps more interesting than the significant gains of the CAT and FFI groups was that their results were so similar. In addition to receiving mean scores that were nearly alike (9.8

vs. 9.63), the CAT and FFI groups produced posttest scores that were also nearly the same (21.47 vs. 21.43), even though the two groups received different instructional treatments. Unlike Laufer and Girsai's study (2008), in which the CAT group significantly outperformed the FFI group on all tests of lexical knowledge, the current study's results suggest that contrastive collocation instruction is not significantly more effective than non-contrastive collocation instruction. One difference between this earlier study and the current investigation may have led to the different outcome reported here: whereas students in Laufer and Girsai (2008) were not notified that they were participating in a study or that they would be tested on vocabulary presented in class, in the current investigation students were told that their collocation training was part of ongoing research. Additionally, students were instructed to study the assigned 25 verb-noun collocations outside of class, as these items would appear throughout the course on graded examinations.[3] The pressure to perform well on these examinations likely motivated both the CAT and FFI groups to extensively review the forms and meanings of the target collocations outside of class. With that said, it seems that while in Laufer and Girsai's (2008) study, CAT participants outperformed their FFI peers after receiving treatments that lasted for a single class session, in the current study both the CAT and FFI treatments were equally effective for teaching L2 collocations over the longer time span of a ten-week academic term.

The fact that both groups performed equally well can be interpreted as good news for language teachers and for collocation instruction in general. As noted above, previous research has proposed a wide variety of learning activities designed to teach collocations and other formulaic sequences. Many of these techniques are highly specialized in that they assign students a very specific task, or are designed to teach a very particular type of formulaic sequence. Two examples illustrate this specificity. First, Lindstromberg and Boers (2008) found that a group dictation exercise could be successfully used to teach collocations with alliterative qualities (e.g., *good guess*). However, the same activity was significantly less effective when applied to non-alliterative collocations. A second example of a specialized exercise can be seen in Yasuda (2010), in which "conceptual metaphors" such as "HAPPY IS UP (*cheer up, feel up*)" were taught to help ESL students learn phrasal verbs. While Yasuda found that the experimental group learning the conceptual metaphors significantly outperformed a control group, others have noted that this technique may ultimately have limited utility because many English phrasal verbs do not fit into Yasuda's proposed framework, pointing out, for instance, that *up* in *put up with* does not fit into the HAPPY IS UP schema (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012).

Limitations like these may make it difficult to transfer highly specific collocation learning activities from the realm of SLA research into contemporary language classrooms, and may partially explain why the teaching of collocations and formulaic sequences is an active area of research, yet remains at the periphery of instructed language learning (Higueras García, 2017). Because these activities are designed for very specific types of formulae, instructors may have difficulty using them on a regular basis to teach the collocations already present in their existing class materials. More importantly, introducing many of these activities in class may be challenging for language instructors with limited linguistic training and little familiarity with the concept of formulaic language: for instance, the task of using cognitive semantics to teach collocations may intimidate many instructors, who may opt to simply

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[3] The format of these examinations was similar to that of the pretest and posttest format: students had to complete sentences with an assigned collocation, and were also graded on their formal accuracy (e.g., *dar a luz*, not **dar de luz*).

avoid teaching collocations altogether.

Given these practical limitations, perhaps the most viable route to integrating collocation instruction into contemporary language classes is to train instructors to teach collocations by using the same types of vocabulary exercises that they already use for teaching individual L2 words. The form-focused instruction (FFI) featured in this study contains conventional vocabulary exercises that many students will recognize, such as a sentence-completion task and a 'write a sentence using X vocabulary item' task. This suggests that the FFI treatment can be easily introduced to both instructors and L2 students, regardless of their level of familiarity with collocations. Furthermore, the FFI treatment can be used to teach a wide range of collocations, and test data indicate that as a method for collocation instruction it is just as effective as Contrastive Analysis and Translation, a more complex teaching method that may not be as readily accessible for non-specialist instructors.

CONCLUSION

This study found that two forms of collocation instruction, Contrastive Analysis and Translation (CAT) and Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), led to the successful learning of 25 verb-noun collocations by L2 learners in an advanced Spanish course. By contrast, almost none of the target collocations were acquired independently by participants in the control group, adding weight to the argument that collocations need to be explicitly taught if they are to be learned by students.

The fact that the learning gains between the two treatment groups were so similar suggests that there is no 'silver bullet' for teaching collocations. In other words, while there are many different learning activities that can be used to teach collocations in a L2 class, any exercise which leads students to cognitively engage with a set of previously selected collocations is likely sufficient for the learning of these items. Additionally, it is argued here that simpler collocation learning activities like those already used for teaching individual words may be preferable over more specialized activities, because they might be more easily introduced in contemporary language classrooms.

To achieve greater ecological validity, this study adopted a naturalistic design in the sense that it measured the effect of collocation instruction over the course of an entire academic term rather than during a single treatment session. This design creates some limitations that may affect the strength of the claims made here. One relates to the control group and its exposure to the target collocations during the ten-week study. Although the texts containing the target collocations were assigned readings that students were required to read, it was not possible to confirm that all students in the control group read all the assigned texts, meaning that some control participants may not have been exposed to all the target collocations. Conversely, it is also possible that some control participants may have, by their own initiative, independently studied some of the test collocations outside of class, although this seems unlikely given the results. A second limitation centers on the fact that students in the experimental group were graded on their knowledge of the target collocations. Because of this, it is possible that the CAT treatment was more effective than the FFI treatment (or vice versa), but that the motivation to know these items for course examinations led both groups to extensively study the assigned collocations outside of class, thus neutralizing the relative superiority of one of the treatments over the other. These two limitations could be addressed by a follow-up study that limits the two instructional treatments to a single training session, and also removes the motivation to study the target items for course examinations. In any

case, it is possible to conclude that both treatments are effective at teaching assigned collocations when these items are factored into the grade of a language course.

Current research on the teaching and learning of collocations has revealed a great deal about how students acquire these lexical units, which are a crucial component of advanced L2 proficiency because they make up a considerable portion of language (Shin & Nation, 2008). Unfortunately, to date, many collocation learning activities seem to have a greater presence in SLA research articles than in contemporary language classrooms. To successfully transfer collocation instruction into the realm of praxis, teachers need to be trained on the use of effective collocation activities that are accessible for both teachers and students. The results of this study suggest that many different types of cognitive engagement will work for the teaching and learning of collocations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Target Collocations

Item	English equivalent(s)
darse cuenta	to realize
salvar su propio pellejo	to save one's own skin
estar a punto de	to be at the point of [doing something]
sacar la basura	to take out the trash
tener sentido	to make sense
quedar claro	to be clear, to be made clear
echarse a perder	to go bad, to spoil
guardar silencio	to keep quiet, to remain silent
hacer caso	to obey, to pay attention to
causar estragos	to wreak havoc
dar a luz	to give birth
perder la razón	to lose one's mind, to go insane
tomar conciencia	to become aware of something
llevar a cabo	to carry out, to implement
poner fin a	to put an end to
llamar la atención	to draw attention
llegar a tiempo	to arrive on time
poner al día	to update, to bring up to speed
dar paso a	to yield to, to make way for
dar a conocer	to make known, to make public
poner en jaque	to put in check, to thwart
hacer una pregunta	to ask a question
estar de acuerdo	to agree, to be in agreement
pedir la palabra	to ask to speak, to request the floor
ser cosa de meses	to be a matter of months

Appendix B: Abridged Student Work from Collocation Workshop

6º taller de colocaciones y modismos

6ᵗʰ Collocations and Idioms Workshop⁴

(Student work is highlighted in yellow)

1er ejercicio: actividad de traducción: *Con un(a) compañero/a, determinen el significado de cada frase en negrita.*

*Exercise One: Translation Activity: With a partner, determine the meaning of each phrase **in bold**.*

"Bueno, quién sabe qué tanto estaba convencida de esta resolución y qué tanto le afectó, pues la pobre, con los años, fue **perdiendo la razón** (Esquivel 221)."

"Well, who knows how she adopted that resolution or how much it affected her, for as the years went by, the poor woman went out of her mind (Esquivel 221)."

To lose your mind

2º ejercicio: Linguee

Perder la razón		
This phrase means:	**This phrase translates directly into English as:**	**Congruent? Explain.**
To lose your mind	To lose the reason	Not quite, "la razón" has a different meaning

> Una frase es **congruente** si es posible traducirla de manera directa.
> *A phrase is **congruent** if it is posible to translate it directly.*
> Hacer la cama ≈ *to make the bed*
> Hacer la maleta ≠ *to make the suitcase*

3ᵉʳ ejercicio: prueba de práctica:

Completa cada oración con la frase correcta. Esta actividad es una <u>prueba</u>, así que no uses ningún recurso externo.

Complete each sentence with the correct phrase. This activity is a <u>quiz</u>, so do not use any outside resource.

1. Cuando perdí mi trabajo, sufría de mucho estrés y no podía dormir. Fue cuando empecé a escuchar voces y ver luces extrañas que me di cuenta que estaba al punto de perder la razón.

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⁴ For the purposes of this article, translations are provided below the text and in italics.

1. *When I lost my job, I suffered from a lot of stress and I could not sleep. It was when I started to hear voices and see strange lights that I realized I was about to* <mark>lose my mind</mark>.