An adverb can provide a semantic restriction for transitive and intransitive verbs. For instance, 'slowly' is a manner adverb used with telic verbs such as 'walk', 'speak' and 'eat'. In 'I slowly walked', the adjunct adverb 'slowly' semantically restricts the verb 'walk'. Since L1 collocations seem not to be activated cross-linguistically (Williams & Cheung, 2011), L2 collocations must be acquired through learning. This study, therefore, investigated whether L2 Japanese adverb-verb collocation frequency affects processing of L1 Chinese speakers learning L2 Japanese, and whether an L1 Chinese speaker’s L2 Japanese proficiency affects the processing of L2 adverb-verb collocational expressions. To test that, this study conducted a visual priming experiment (prime: adverb; target: verb) for collocational decisions (whether a primed adverb is correctly used with a target verb) on L1 Chinese speakers learning L2 Japanese with advanced/intermediate Japanese proficiencies. Frequencies of adverb-verb collocation were controlled (high and low). A 2 (advanced/intermediate L2 proficiency) x 2 (high/low adverb-verb collocation) ANOVA on reaction time and accuracy was conducted. First, collocational decisions were made more quickly and accurately for verbs with high adverb-verb collocations compared with low collocations. A single adverb has syntagmatic connections to multiple verbs which are activated in their strengths indicated by collocational frequency. Second, L2 participants with an advanced proficiency made collocational decisions more quickly and accurately than those with an intermediate proficiency. Given that L2 collocations are learned, knowledge of adverbial semantic restrictions to verbs grows as learners become more proficient in Japanese. Third, both groups had lower accuracy rates for low collocation frequency items, and intermediate speakers had longer reaction times. Although the advanced group showed faster processing, low collocation items were not clearly stored (or learned) by either group. This study provides evidence for knowledge of adverbial semantic restrictions to verbs in L2 acquisition.

Keywords: semantic restriction, adverbs, collocation.