

APPLICATION OF LEXICAL CHUNK THEORY IN TEACHING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract. *The theory of lexical chunks first emerged in the process of learning and teaching English and later became one of the most effective approaches in language acquisition. This article examines how lexical chunks can be applied in teaching Chinese to foreigners. Lexical chunks are prefabricated word combinations that help learners produce speech more quickly and naturally. Although this approach is widely used in English language teaching today, it has only recently begun to be introduced into Chinese language instruction. It should be noted that the implementation of chunk-based teaching methods can improve the quality of Chinese language education.*

Keywords: *lexical chunks; chunk theory; language teaching method; Chinese language teaching; foreign language acquisition; prefabricated language units; English language teaching; second language learning; communicative competence; teaching methodology.*

Annotatsiya. *Til bloklari nazariyasi birinchi bo‘lib ingliz tilini o‘qitish va o‘rganish jarayonida paydo bo‘lgan bo‘lib, keyinchalik til o‘rganishdagi eng samarali metodlardan biriga aylangan. Ushbu maqolada til bloklarining chet elliklarga xitoy tilini o‘qitishda qo‘llanilishi ko‘rib chiqiladi. Til bloklari tayyor so‘z birikmalari bo‘lib, ular nutqni tez va tabiiy shakllantirishga yordam beradi. Hozirda bu usul asosan ingliz tilida keng qo‘llanilayotgan bo‘lsa-da, xitoy tilini o‘qitishda endigina kirib kelmoqda. Til bloklari asosida o‘qitish usulini joriy etish xitoy tili ta‘lim sifatini oshiradi.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *Til bloklari; til bloklari nazariyasi; til o‘qitish usuli; xitoy tilini o‘qitish; chet tillarni o‘rganish; tayyor so‘z birikmalari; ingliz tili ta‘limi; ikkinchi tilni o‘rganish; kommunikativ kompetensiya; o‘qitish.*

Аннотация. *Теория языковых блоков впервые возникла в процессе обучения и преподавания английского языка и впоследствии стала одним из наиболее эффективных методов изучения языка. В данной статье рассматривается применение языковых блоков в обучении китайскому языку иностранцев. Языковые блоки представляют собой готовые словосочетания, которые помогают учащимся быстрее и естественнее формировать речь. Хотя данный подход широко используется в обучении английскому языку, в преподавании китайского языка он начал применяться лишь недавно. Внедрение метода обучения на основе языковых блоков способствует повышению качества преподавания китайского языка.*

Ключевые слова: *языковые блоки; теория языковых блоков; методика преподавания языка; обучение китайскому языку; изучение иностранных языков; готовые словосочетания; преподавание английского языка; изучение второго языка; коммуникативная компетенция; методика обучения.*

Introduction. Lexical chunks refer to language units that are stored in human memory as prefabricated wholes and are frequently used in speech. Such units help learners construct sentences more quickly and easily, making language use more natural. Therefore, in language learning, it is important not only to study grammatical rules but

also to learn ready-made expressions. Different scholars have used various terms to describe this approach; however, their main idea remains the same, emphasizing the importance of prefabricated lexical units in language acquisition. At present, language learning through lexical chunks is becoming increasingly widespread. In China, this method is mainly used for teaching foreign languages rather than Chinese itself. Different experiments and studies on learning through this method are currently being conducted, and it is now gradually being introduced into the process of learning Chinese as well. One of the reasons is that lexical chunks in the Chinese language have not yet been sufficiently identified and studied. Therefore, more research is being carried out in this field. The main purpose of this article is to provide brief information about lexical chunks in Chinese and to introduce this method to learners for studying the Chinese language. In addition, this approach can make learning Chinese easier, increase the number of learners, and further improve the quality of Chinese language teaching. The theory of lexical chunks was proposed in the early 1990s by Nattinger and DeCarrico. They referred to frequently used phrases and word combinations in English learning as “lexical chunks.” For example: on the other hand, as soon as possible, as well as, and look forward to. Such units are stored in human memory as ready-made forms and are quickly retrieved during speech production, making it easier and faster to construct sentences. Therefore, they are also called “prefabricated chunks of language.” Lexical chunks have been rarely applied in teaching Chinese to foreigners. Nevertheless, introducing this approach into Chinese language classrooms may be effective and can serve as a basis for developing a new teaching method.

Methods. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method based on literature analysis and examination of Chinese language teaching materials. The “lexical chunk teaching method” refers to an approach in which teachers, based on lexical chunk theory, place greater emphasis on teaching fixed expressions, common collocations, and frequently used language patterns in Chinese. In this process, learners study not only the grammatical structures of these language units, but also their usage, communicative functions, and meanings within a text. Through continuous repetition, practice, and application of lexical chunks, students activate their existing language knowledge and cognitive abilities. As a result, vocabulary and grammar are learned in an integrated way, which helps learners improve their overall communicative competence. This method was not created randomly; rather, it is supported by both theoretical foundations and practical applicability. Psycholinguistics emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as an interdisciplinary field combining linguistics and psychology. This discipline studies the psychological processes and mechanisms involved in language production, comprehension, and use. Its primary aim is to achieve a deeper understanding of the nature and essence of human language. In foreign countries, many studies have been conducted in the fields of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. For example, Altmann (1990)

developed a cognitive model of language processing and examined speech processing from the perspectives of psycholinguistics and computational analysis, focusing on lexical recognition and sentence processing in spoken language. In earlier periods, second language acquisition was mainly studied from the perspectives of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and cultural linguistics, while psychological factors received less attention. In reality, however, cognitive activity is one of the main factors influencing language learning because language itself is a product of the human mind. According to cognitive linguistics, both first and second language acquisition occur through the interaction of two systems. The first is a rule-based system formed through long-term learning, and the second is an example-based system developed through specific language patterns and models. Together, these two systems form the basis for language analysis and production. During language acquisition, sentence structures are processed according to grammatical rules, while at the same time numerous stored lexical chunks in human memory help process and organize linguistic information. Therefore, storing and retrieving lexical chunks is closely connected to human cognitive needs.

Result. Psychological studies conducted as early as the 1940s and 1950s demonstrated that lexical chunks play an essential role in language recognition, learning, and comprehension. Learners need systematic and effective methods to organize vocabulary, strengthen grammatical knowledge, and process information efficiently. Altmann (1990) pointed out that lexical recognition is influenced by factors such as repetition, competition, interaction, context, and syntactic structure. The storage and retrieval of lexical chunks allow learners to repeatedly use language units, which deepens their understanding of grammatical rules and strengthens the relationship between vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, the lexical chunk teaching method is based on cognitive theory and is consistent with both the规律 of Chinese language acquisition and learners' cognitive needs. Every teaching method should be based on the characteristics of language itself. Language has the ability to generate new forms according to certain rules. According to Sinclair (1991) and Skehan (1991), language is both a grammar-based analytical system and a memory-based formulaic system. Analyzing grammatical structures, storing them in memory, and reproducing them later correspond to the natural process of human language cognition. This idea became one of the foundations for the development of lexical chunk theory. With the development of cognitive linguistics, increasing attention has been given to the influence of cognitive structures on language use. As a result, research on second language teaching has gradually focused more on creative cognitive processes and the individual linguistic characteristics of learners. Many researchers have realized that the traditional method of memorizing everything mechanically is no longer effective enough for second language acquisition. International students often rely on the rules of their native language when learning Chinese. Therefore, ready-made language structures, known as lexical chunks, help learners understand and

use Chinese more quickly and naturally. Although the influence of the native language may sometimes create difficulties, lexical chunks support more effective and creative language acquisition.

Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) argued that language fluency depends not only on grammatical knowledge but also on the number of lexical chunks stored in memory. Research has also shown that a large part of everyday speech is made up of fixed language expressions. For this reason, lexical chunks help learners connect vocabulary and grammar more effectively in communication. Lexical chunk theory is suitable not only for English language teaching but also for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. This approach matches the characteristics of the Chinese language and the requirements of modern teaching methodology. Previously, Chinese language teaching mainly relied on grammatical and communicative approaches. The grammatical method focused more on grammar rules, while the communicative method emphasized practical communication. However, both approaches had certain limitations. The lexical chunk teaching method combines vocabulary, grammar, and practical language use, making language learning more effective. The ideas of this approach can also be seen in the works of Zhao Jinming, who highlighted the importance of teaching fixed expressions and common language patterns. Therefore, the lexical chunk teaching method can be effectively applied in teaching Chinese to foreign learners.

Discussion. Different scholars classify lexical chunks in different ways. Zhu Honglin (2005) divides them into social types, topic-related types, and discourse-structuring types. Lewis (1997) categorizes them based on grammatical structure into multi-word units, high-frequency collocations, fixed expressions, and semi-fixed expressions. Howarth (1998) further classifies them into full idioms, metaphorical idioms, and restricted combinations. However, the classification of Chinese lexical chunks is still at an early stage of development. In this study, based on the textbook “Bridge – Practical Chinese Intermediate Course (Upper)” edited by Chen Zhuo and classroom teaching experience, Chinese lexical chunks are analyzed according to their grammatical function and structural form. Fixed expressions include strongly grammaticalized words such as: 总算, 轻易, 始终, 不得了, 万一, as well as idioms like: 实事求是, 哭笑不得, 弄虚作假, 乐极生悲, and figurative expressions such as: 掏腰包, 天昏地暗, 一股脑儿, 手舞足蹈. There are also fixed grammatical constructions such as: because...so..., since...then..., even if..., as well as structures with *ba* and *bei*, which are frequently used in texts and are important for understanding sentence structure. Another group consists of fixed formulaic expressions and set phrases, such as: hello, goodbye, sorry, it doesn't matter, wish you a safe journey, which are widely used in everyday communication. Word-formation elements include morphemes such as 家, 者, 老, as well as structural patterns like ...then..., ...belong to..., ...etc. Sentence-structure elements refer to constructions used in

different positions within a sentence: sentence-initial markers such as so-called..., according to..., speaking of..., mentioning...; insertions such as it seems, apparently, to be honest; and sentence-final elements such as up, out, away, down. The lexical chunk teaching method is implemented through two main stages: input and output. In the input stage, teachers plan lessons, classify lexical chunks, and explain their grammatical functions, usage, and meanings in context. This helps students clearly understand and recognize different language chunks. In the output stage, teachers organize practice activities using examples and communicative tasks. Repetition with variation is important to help students consolidate knowledge and use it in real communication. Homework and assessments should also reinforce lexical chunk learning so that students gradually develop a habit of learning language in chunks.

Conclusion. The lexical chunk teaching method is an effective approach in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. It emphasizes learning language in fixed and frequently used units, which helps learners combine vocabulary and grammar in a natural way. The teaching process includes both input and output stages, where students first understand lexical chunks and then practice them through communication and repetition. This method improves textbook design, enriches teaching strategies, and enhances classroom effectiveness. It also reduces negative transfer from the mother tongue and helps learners develop balanced language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Overall, lexical chunk teaching enables students to use Chinese more naturally, fluently, and appropriately in real communication situations.

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