

Empirical Research on Influences of Lexical Chunks on Fluency, Accuracy and Diversity of Oral English

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Abstract: Lexical chunks are lexicalized chunks that integrate vocabulary and grammar. In learning lexical chunks, learners not only learn vocabulary itself, but also its grammatical structure and pragmatic functions related to its context. There is a close relationship between chunk memory and spoken English. This study finds that lexical chunk memory can improve oral fluency, accuracy and diversity.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy, the exchanges between China and other countries in the world have become more and more close. English, as a medium of communication, plays an increasingly important role in international exchanges. Therefore, improving college student's oral English ability is conducive to helping students seize opportunities and meet challenges. However, at present, college student's oral English learning methods are single and the learning effect is not good. Therefore, improving students' oral English learning effect has become an important issue for college teachers to solve. Lexical chunk approach focuses on cultivating student's ability to use vocabulary and grammar, which provides a new way for college English teachers to teach spoken English.

In this study, lexical chunks refer to common collocations and sentence frames with complete grammatical structure, clear semantics and relatively fixed meanings (Qi Yan et al. 2015; Qi Yan, Xu Cuiqin 2015). Lewis 1993; Qiyang, Xu Cuiqin 2015): (1) A multi-word phrase composed of two or more words has a fixed form and meaning, such as "last but not least". (2) The frequent occurrence of fixed phrase collocations, such as "have dinner". (3) Multi-word combinations with fixed or semi-fixed forms and specific pragmatic functions can be replaced by some components, such as "as... as possible". (4) A sentence framework with fixed or semi-fixed form and function, such as "it is reported that...". (Lewis 1993; Qiyang, Xu Cuiqin 2015). Miller (1956) points out that chunks can relieve the pressure of language processing and make up for the lack of the ability to process information in a timely manner. Therefore, the effective use of lexical chunks can alleviate the pressure in the process of language processing in the brain, thereby improving language output.

At present, many studies have explored the importance of lexical chunk approach in oral English teaching. Part of the research explores the relationship between lexical chunks and oral English teaching from the theoretical level, thus providing a strong theoretical support for the application of lexical chunk teaching method (Boers & Lindstromberg 2009; Lewis 1997; Wray 2008). Part of the research demonstrates the effectiveness of lexical chunk teaching method in oral English teaching through teaching experiments, thus providing further empirical support for the application of lexical chunk teaching method in oral English teaching (Boers et al. 2006; Wood 2009; Yuanping, Guo Fenrong 2010; Qiyang, Jiang Yumei, Zhu Xueyuan 2015; Qiyang, Xu Cuiqin 2015). At present, research has focused on the important role of lexical chunk teaching and lexical chunk application in oral English teaching. There are few theoretical and empirical studies on the relationship between lexical chunk memory and oral English. Song Miao (2004) explored the influence of concentrated input with reciting phrases and sentence patterns as the core on oral output. The experimental results show that there is a strong correlation between lexical chunk memory and oral English. Reduced input is conducive to improving student's oral performance. Qi Yan and Xia Jun (2016) investigated

the effects of reciting lexical chunks on oral English and writing. They mainly discussed the differences of the effects of lexical chunk memory on oral English and writing. The experimental results show that English lexical chunk memory can improve the fluency, accuracy and complexity of student's oral and written English. The experimental sample size is small and the experimental period is short. In view of this, this study intends to expand the number of subjects and prolong the experimental time, focusing on the impact of chunk memory on College Oral English fluency, accuracy and diversity.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Questions.

- (1) How does lexical chunk memory affect student's oral English fluency?
- (2) How does lexical chunk memory affect the accuracy of student's oral English?
- (3) How does lexical chunk memory affect student's oral English diversity?

2.2 Research Objects.

The subjects of this study are 60 non-English major freshmen from two universities. They are divided into experimental group and control group with 30 students in each group. They have similar educational backgrounds, come from the same college, and have six years of English learning experience. Before the experiment, in order to ensure that there is no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in the performance of oral English, students will take oral tests before the experiment. Oral test questions come from the school oral question bank. Students need to express their opinions in English at a limited time according to the given topic. Teachers score students according to their comprehensive oral performance. Through independent sample T-test analysis, there was no significant difference in oral performance between the experimental group and the control group ($t = 1.335, P = 0.187 > 0.05$).

Research Design. After the oral test, the experimental group and the control group participated in a 16-week (4-month) teaching experiment. In the process of teaching experiment, the lexical chunk teaching method is introduced into the experimental group and the control group. The author is an English teacher of the experimental group and the control group. She teaches English listening and speaking courses for three hours a week. Teachers teach students five phrases and three sentence frameworks a week. All phrases and sentence frameworks come from teaching materials, such as "and things like that" and "It is significant that...". The experimental group students need to recite phrases and sentence frames after class, while the control group students have no recitation requirements. In order to ensure that the students complete the recitation task, the teacher checks the student's recitation by dictation before class. After 16 weeks of teaching, the students took the final oral test. Final exam questions also come from the school oral question bank. Students need to express their opinions in English on specific topics within a given time. The whole course of the oral test is recorded and transcribed into written materials as oral corpus. The independent sample T test is used to analyze the oral corpus so as to determine the influence of lexical chunk memory on oral fluency, accuracy and diversity. After the oral test, the author randomly selected three students from the experimental group for interviews, mainly to understand the student's recognition of lexical chunks and their after-class lexical chunks.

Language Level Indexes. The three indicators used to measure language proficiency in this study are fluency, accuracy and diversity. Fluency refers to the amount of language output per unit time. In this study, fluency is defined as the number of pronunciation words per minute. The calculation method is: total number of words, duration X60. Accuracy refers to the fact that there are no grammatical errors in student's language output, which conforms to grammatical rules. The calculation method of accuracy in this study is: the total number of error-free T units T units. T unit refers to the unit consisting of a main clause and its clauses (Jiang Lin, Chen Jin 2015). Diversity refers to the richness of language output. In this study, the calculation methods of diversity are: total clauses T units. The specific evaluation index calculation method is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Calculation method of fluency, accuracy and diversity

Fluency	Total number of words / time x 60
Accuracy	Number of correct T unit / number of T unit
Diversity	Total number of clauses / number of T unit

3. Analysis and Discussion of Experiment Results

After 16 weeks of teaching, there were significant differences between the experimental group (lexical chunk memory) and the control group (no lexical chunk memory) in oral fluency, accuracy and diversity, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Indexes comparison of fluency, accuracy and diversity of spoken English

Index	Group (number)	Average	Standard deviation	T value	P value
Fluency	Experimental group (30)	94.8180	27.72475	4.377	.000
	control group (30)	70.9249	11.18656		
Accuracy	Experimental group (30)	.8643	.10644	3.761	0.000
	control group (30)	.7507	.12679		
Diversity	Experimental group (30)	.2160	.12425	4.474	0.000
	control group (30)	.0960	.07837		

The experimental data show that there are significant differences in oral fluency, accuracy and diversity between the experimental group and the control group ($t = 4.377$, $P = 0.000$; $t = 3.761$, $P = 0.000$; $t = 4.474$, $P = 0.000$), and the significant difference is $p < 0.05$, which proves that chunk memory can improve student's oral fluency, accuracy and diversity. The experimental results are basically consistent with those of Song Miao (2004), Qi Yan and Xia Jun (2016). Logan (1988) points out that memory helps to improve language fluency. Language production depends on knowledge stored in the brain rather than on sentences assembled temporarily by language rules. Therefore, when students have some knowledge of lexical chunks in their brains, they can directly extract relevant lexical chunks from their brains in the process of oral production, which shortens the processing time of the brain and reduces the processing burden of the brain, thus improving the fluency of student's oral expression. In addition, lexical chunks have fixed collocations and grammatical structures, as well as specific semantics and usage contexts. Students directly extract fixed collocations or sentence frameworks in oral expression. On the one hand, student's oral expressions are more authentic and conform to English expression habits; on the other hand, they help students reduce the use of grammar rules. Law constructs sentence frame or collocation probability by itself, which reduces the probability of student's oral errors and improves the accuracy of students' oral English (Qi Yan, Xia Jun; 2016). Finally, through chunk recitation, students master many phrases and sentence frameworks such as "there is no doubt that...", which not only improve the logic and coherence of student's oral discourse organization, but also make students' oral production more diverse.

Through interviews, the author finds that although students in the experimental group think that memorizing lexical chunks is helpful to oral English learning, some students in the experimental group do not actively memorize lexical chunks after class. Students need to be urged by their teachers to spend time memorizing lexical chunks. This shows that student's understanding of lexical chunk memory needs to be further improved, and teachers need to make students realize the importance and benefits of lexical chunk memory through appropriate ways in daily teaching, and urge students to memorize lexical chunks.

4. Conclusion

Through experiments, this study finds that lexical chunk memory is conducive to improving oral fluency, accuracy and diversity. In addition, through interviews, the author finds that college student's understanding of lexical chunk memory needs to be further improved. Based on the above findings, we can get the following enlightenments: 1. Teachers should recognize that vocabulary and grammar cannot be separated. They should regard lexical chunks as the basic unit of language and improve their understanding of lexical chunks. 2. Teachers should introduce the concept of lexical chunk teaching in daily teaching, cultivate student's lexical chunk awareness, and make students realize the benefits and importance of lexical chunk memory. 3. Teachers can take various forms to urge students to memorize lexical chunks and create opportunities to help students use lexical chunks for language output, so as to improve student's oral fluency, accuracy and diversity.

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