

# Research on Improving English Writing Ability by Lexical Chunks Approach

Fang Cai\*

College of Foreign Languages, Liaoning Institute of Science and Engineering, Jinzhou, China  
6642103@qq.com

\*Corresponding Author

**Abstract:** As a whole linguistic unit, lexical chunks have the characteristics of prefabrication and extraction. Based on the relevant theories, this paper analyzes the existing problems in English writing teaching, expounds the advantages of lexical chunks in improving English writing ability, and puts forward some countermeasures to improve English writing ability. The problems include: the obsolete teaching mode of English writing, the influence of negative cultural transfer, the neglect of cultural infiltration in the process of writing, and the students' poor basic knowledge of English. The advantages include: reducing the negative transfer of mother tongue in writing, improving the fluency of English writing, quickly building the overall framework of the article, and improving the coherence and logic of the article. The countermeasures include: accumulating and enriching lexical chunks through various channels, paying attention to the cultural connotations contained in lexical chunks, training students' lexical chunks identification ability, strengthening the combination of lexical chunks and mind map, and improving students' autonomous learning ability of English lexical chunks.

**Keywords:** Lexical chunks approach; English writing; Problems; Advantages; Countermeasures

## 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important contents of English teaching. This paper starts with the analysis of the characteristics of English words, sentences, paragraphs and articles, so that students can master the characteristics of words, sentence structure, paragraphs and chapters. Through the reading and writing practice of model essays, students can systematically master the basic knowledge and skills of English writing, skillfully write all kinds of English practical essays and improve their written expression ability. They also strive to achieve the accuracy of words, correct grammar, and expression in line with English habits.

The memory, storage, output and use of language are not based on a single word, but on a fixed or semi fixed block structure. Lexical chunk is a fixed or semi fixed combination of multiple words according to a certain grammar. Lexical chunks, which combine the advantages of grammar, semantics and context, play an important role in foreign language learning [1]. The purpose of lexical chunks teaching is to improve students' sensitivity to "chunking" and cultivate their ability to use lexical chunks through the cycle of "observation, hypothesis and verification". Lexical chunks approach takes chunk as the core of teaching. It not only pays attention to grammatical structure, but also pays attention to the application in specific context. It follows the idea that the composition of language is grammaticalized vocabulary, not lexicalized grammar. At the same time, students' attention should be shifted from word learning to lexical chunk learning. The lexical chunk learning should be used to build a language network, not just to explain and translate the target language, so as to give full play to students' subjective initiative.

As a whole linguistic unit, lexical chunks have the characteristics of prefabrication and extraction. The purpose of writing ability training is to help students input a large number of lexical chunks to ensure that they can be extracted in a short time when necessary. A large number of lexical chunks stored in the brain can help to reduce the decoding pressure, shorten the output time and improve the fluency of language expression. A word block could be producible, which means that a lexical chunk could produce some words of the same attribute within the same type. When students memorize the relevant lexical chunks within a certain range, they will also remember the lexical chunks related to this lexical chunk group [2]. Therefore, in the process of writing, language output can be expanded better. Lexical chunks approach has changed the traditional teaching mode of writing and plays an important

role in cultivating students' language ability.

## **2. Theoretical Basis**

### ***2.1. The Dual System Theory of Language***

Skehan and Wary put forward the dual system theory of language. First, language is a rule-based analysis system, which is composed of a large number of words and grammar, relatively closed and fixed. Second, language is a system of formulas based on memory, which is composed of lexical chunks with communicative functions and relatively open and flexible. The former is mainly short-term memory, which is abstract and difficult to extract. The latter is mainly about long-term memory and more specific, which could be quickly extracted from the memory to meet the needs of instant communication, making the language fluent and accurate. These two systems complement each other and are indispensable elements in language. The formulaic system based on memory is composed of chunks. If we master chunks, we can save time and effort in language output.

### ***2.2. Cognitive Psychology Theory***

Cognitive psychology studies people's advanced psychological process. It is concerned about the psychological mechanism as the basis of human behavior. It is mainly the cognitive process, including attention, perception, representation, memory, thinking and speech. The core is the internal psychological process between information input and output. Lexical chunk use involves many psychological cognitive factors, the most important of which is working memory. Working memory is used for the temporary storage and preliminary screening of language information, and then to establish a connection with the retrieval or extraction of relevant information from long-term memory, so as to provide a reference for language information processing. Students absorb, collect and store a large number of lexical chunks from the input of language information, which are solidified in long-term memory after repeated cognition and memory [3].

### ***2.3. Information Processing Theory***

According to information processing theory, cognitive process is the process of information processing. From short-term memory to long-term memory, information has undergone a critical change, which needs to go through the coding process. Coding is not to gather relevant information together, but to organize information in various ways. From the point of view of information processing, students should input, store, code and extract the words in the process of learning, and guide them to establish the emotional network between the words, including broad processing and deep processing, so as to improve their comprehension and written expression ability. The closer the network is connected, the faster the information would be activated and extracted.

## **3. Problems in English Writing Teaching**

### ***3.1. The Obsolete Teaching Mode of English writing***

Teaching mode is a stable and concise theoretical model of teaching structure and a practical activity mode of its specific operation formed around a certain theme under the guidance of certain teaching ideas and rich teaching experience in order to achieve specific teaching objectives and contents. The traditional English teaching mode lacks guidance for students. The writing process is just a simple process of material translation. It lacks dialogue and collision of views, creative thinking and internalization of knowledge. At the same time, it cannot stimulate students' interest in writing and creative thinking. The motivation and creativity of writing are suppressed [4].

### ***3.2. The Influence of Negative Cultural Transfer Cannot be Eliminated***

Due to the interference and influence of the mother tongue, they rigidly apply the grammatical rules and language habits of English and have no clear understanding of the meaning of English words. Besides, they do not really grasp the connotation of vocabulary, and lack the ability to use vocabulary flexibly. In the process of writing, students just express the logical relationship and omit the transition words. What's more, the thinking modes of the two languages are different. English emphasizes

hypotaxis. The logical relationship between sentence elements depends on the expression of connectives, and the sentence structure is rigorous. However, Chinese emphasizes parataxis, and there is implicit logical relationship between sentence elements. The sentence structure is relatively loose due to less use of related words.

### ***3.3. The Neglect of Cultural Infiltration in the Process of Writing***

Language learners should not only learn the language form, but also the cultural connotation, that is the language in culture and the culture in language. Cultural differences may cause misunderstanding in language communication [5]. At present, English writing teaching only pays attention to the correctness of language. Teachers focus on teaching language knowledge points, but rarely give real language environment, rarely analyze language differences on the cultural level. Although students have a good grasp of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they always use Chinese thinking habits to express themselves in English. As a result, their writing level is difficult to improve.

### ***3.4. The Students' Poor Basic Knowledge of English***

The basic knowledge of English directly affects the writing level, and many students' basic knowledge of English is not solid [6]. For example, first, there are always some differences between the former and the latter, mainly reflected in the mixed use of "you" and "we". Second, the tenses are often used include past tense, present tense, progressive tense and perfect tense. Third, the structure of the article and the passage are not clear, and the sentences are not complete. Forth, many relevant words are used in the writing, including "but, besides, for", and so on. Some students don't use relevant words at all. Fifth, some simple sentences, words and sentence patterns are repeated in the writing, which makes the language expression dull.

## **4. The Advantages of Lexical Chunks in Improving English Writing Ability**

### ***4.1. Reduce the Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue in Writing***

The biggest difference between mother tongue learning and foreign language learning is that mother tongue learners master a large number of lexical chunks that can be used according to the language environment. When using mother tongue, language knowledge seldom appears in the form of analytic grammar rules, but more in the form of lexical chunks. Lexical chunks can prevent foreign language learners from using them as their mother tongue and fundamentally inhibit Chinglish. Lexical chunks can make learners aware of the cultural differences carried by the language, so as to consciously avoid the negative transfer of mother tongue culture. In the teaching of English writing, students should be aware of the universality and necessity of lexical chunks and use them directly according to the needs of context.

### ***4.2. Improve the Fluency of English Writing***

Language fluency depends on the amount of chunks stored, not just the grammatical rules and lexical data stored in the brain. Lexical chunks are stored in their own vocabulary as a whole, which can be used quickly without temporary combination in communication. It can reduce the burden of brain coding, save the time of language processing, and achieve the purpose of fluent language use. Only by using a large number of lexical chunks to lighten the burden of memory can we write high-quality articles. Fluency in English writing depends not only on the speed of writing and the agility of thinking, but also on the accumulation and use of lexical chunks [7].

### ***4.3. Build the Overall Framework of the Article Quickly***

Lexical chunks can effectively express the textual structure in English writing. Therefore, students can use lexical chunks to construct a text, and use lexical chunks to make the text more coherent. Teachers can create writing templates of related topics and genres according to the actual needs of teaching and students' existing knowledge level. For example, the text structure "one day..., then..., next..., finally..." that students summarized can help students describe the course of things, form a good frame structure, speed up the construction of discourse, and make the writing ideas clear and visual.

#### ***4.4. Improve the Coherence and Logic of the Article.***

Whether the content of an article is expressed clearly is directly related to the coherence and logic. Many students write English articles with single sentence structure and loose structure, mainly because they can't use lexical chunks to express cohesion and transition. In order to improve coherence and logic, students are guided to accumulate lexical chunks representing cohesion and transition in daily teaching. First, the conjunctions of choice or equivalence are either...or, neither...nor, as well as...Second, the conjunctions in chronological order are at first, then, later, at the beginning, in the end...The conjunctions that indicate the conclusion are in a word, in short, to sum up, in all...The use of discourse connectives in sentences and paragraphs serves as a link between the preceding and the following [8].

### **5. Lexical Chunks Approach Improves Countermeasures in English Writing Ability**

#### ***5.1. Accumulate and Enrich Lexical Chunks Through Various Channels***

According to the relationship between language input and output, quality input can drive quality output. English learning lacks language environment, so students need to consciously accumulate lexical chunks, store them in the brain as a whole, strengthen them regularly, and strengthen the accumulation and mastery. There are two main ways to accumulate lexical chunks: intentional learning and incidental learning. Intentional learning refers to conscious learning, and recitation is an indispensable means. On the basis of strengthening memory, the learned lexical chunks are internalized into psychological lexical chunks. Incidental learning is an effective way to master a large number of vocabulary. In the process of reading or listening, we can acquire a lot of vocabulary knowledge by understanding the rich context and form a mental lexical chunk library.

#### ***5.2. Pay Attention to the Cultural Connotations Contained in Lexical Chunks***

Culture includes language, which is a special cultural phenomenon. Language is the carrier of culture, which contains a nation's unique traditional culture, way of thinking, social psychology, national customs, value orientation and social concept. Language is the main way of human thinking and cultural exchange. The formation of language and the development of culture restrict each other. The connotations of different cultures are embodied in different languages, especially in vocabulary. Language and culture depend on each other. Learning the cultural connotation of lexical chunks can help us to understand lexical chunks more deeply. We can also learn more about the cultural characteristics of English-speaking countries, pay attention to the cultural differences between English and Chinese, lay stress on cultural infiltration, and deeply understand the cultural connotation, so as to avoid misuse of English.

#### ***5.3. Train students' Lexical Chunks Identification Ability***

Lexical chunk recognition is a process of repeated proficiency. After establishing lexical chunk awareness, students need to improve their lexical chunk application ability through training. Lexical chunk recognition training includes four parts: lexical chunk review, lexical chunk discovery, lexical chunk practice and lexical chunk application [9]. Lexical chunk application is to train students' ability to use multiple lexical chunks to compose a text. It not only guides students to choose appropriate lexical chunks for combination, but also guides students to pay attention to the use of related words and the adjustment of word order structure in the process of lexical chunk cohesion. It makes students use lexical chunks more smoothly by giving examples, simulating conversations and imitating articles. The training of lexical chunk recognition ability is the process of deepening memory and consolidating understanding in lexical chunk learning. Only by continuously strengthening students' lexical chunk recognition foundation, can we complete the rich accumulation of lexical chunks.

#### ***5.4. Strengthen the Combination of Lexical Chunks and Mind Map***

The mind map directly reflects the thinking process of the human brain. It uses multiple colors of lines and symbols to effectively dig out the right brain function, and reflects the potential functions of vision, comprehensive, divinity and painting [10]. Mind map can stimulate the knowledge stored in the mind, open up ideas, enrich the content of writing, enhance the logic of English writing, and improve

the confusion of thinking in the process of writing to the maximum extent. Mind map can present lexical chunks clearly and intuitively. When encountering compositions similar to this topic in the future, according to the existing writing framework and specific content in the mind, mind map can help students sort out and accumulate lexical chunks in an orderly way, so as to improve the efficiency of applying lexical chunks in the process of language output.

### **5.5. Improve Students' Autonomous Learning Ability of English Lexical Chunks**

There are a large number of lexical chunks in English. It is difficult to master a lot of lexical chunks in the limited classroom time. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and give full play to students' main role in lexical chunks learning. Students are required to consciously accumulate a large number of lexical chunks, consciously cultivate their ability to use lexical chunks and reduce their dependence on teachers. In the stage of independent learning, it would be more efficient to strengthen the learning strategy of lexical chunks and improve the comprehensive sense of use. In terms of time arrangement, it can be divided into long-term, medium-term and short-term plans to guide students to adjust their learning plans and goals at any time. Teachers also should take the initiative to communicate with students, solve the problems they encounter in lexical chunks learning, and guide students to improve their efficiency through cooperative learning. Then, the purpose of this study is to guide students to make a stage summary of lexical chunks learning, find out the characteristics of lexical chunks learning, and quickly expand the number of lexical chunks.

## **6. Conclusions**

Lexical chunks have the characteristics of integrating grammar, semantics and context, which is the most ideal language teaching unit, playing an important role in the process of language formation and use. Lexical chunks approach has an important influence on English writing. Teachers should establish advanced teaching concepts, cultivate students' awareness of lexical chunks, guide students to identify, accumulate and use lexical chunks, and strengthen the input and output of lexical chunks. In English writing, attention should be paid to the extraction of lexical chunks and the proper use of all kinds of lexical chunks to improve the correctness and effectiveness of the use of lexical chunks. At the same time, we should constantly explore and improve teaching methods, cultivate students' scientific learning methods and good learning habits, strengthen the guidance of writing skills, stimulate students' subjective initiative, and guide students to write fluent and beautiful articles.

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