

A Survey Report on the Characteristics of Cognitive Ability of English Prefabricated Chunks for Higher Vocational College Students

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Abstract. This paper uses a questionnaire to find out that the cognitive ability of higher vocational college students in English prefabricated chunks is weak, and there are many problems such as insufficient knowledge reserve of prefabricated chunks and weak awareness of their use. The aim is to develop students' learning habits of memorizing, understanding, applying and transferring English language with prefabricated chunks as the smallest unit.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most important component of a language learner's language expression is the prefabricated chunk. For language instructors, helping language learners to develop the ability to use prefabricated chunks is the key to making language teaching more effective. Since the 1970s, language instructors and learners have focused consistently on teaching prefabricated chunks. Research in second language acquisition and corpus linguistics has shown that a large number of fixed or semi-fixed linguistic structures with both syntactic and lexical features exist in people's natural language, and that these patterned structures, stored in the brain in a holistic form, form the most basic linguistic units in English, known as chunks. As early as 1975, the linguist Becker regarded this fixed or semi-fixed, patterned structure of chunks as prefabricated chunks, which takes into account the smallest units of grammatical and lexical features[1]. Lewis (1993) suggests that "language is not made up of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but often of multi-word, prefabricated chunks of speech".[2] Altenberg & Granger (2001) found that 70% of people's natural discourse is made up of prefabricated chunks[3]. What they've found corroborates Becker's description of the characteristics of prefabricated chunks. Nattinger & Decarrio (1992), on the other hand, emphasise that the ability to prefabricate chunks of speech is crucial in determining language fluency.[4] In 2000, according to their form and function, Nattinger & Decarrio proposed a representative classification of chunks including polywords, institutionalized expressions, phrasal constraints and sentence builders. The classification of prefabricated chunks provides an effective pathway for English language learners to store, remember, extract, apply, process and create prefabricated chunks. Chinese scholars Ya Qi n and Jun Xia[5]; Feng Chen[6]; Suqin

Jiang[7]; Fenglong Cao and Chenchen Zhang[8] et. respectively studied the influence of prefabricated chunks on the improvement of students' abilities in writing, speaking, listening, reading and translation, and achieved great research results. Although research on learners' perceptions of prefabricated chunks has focused on undergraduate English majors[9] (Linlin, Diao 2004) and Chinese students at the preliminary education level[10] (Duqin, Wang, 2013), few studies have been conducted to investigate the cognitive ability of English prefabricated chunks among higher vocational college students, who are important members of the English language learner community and whose level of cognition of prefabricated chunks affects their accuracy, complexity and fluency in English language use during English language communication. At the same time, instructors in higher vocational colleges should understand the extent of higher vocational college students' knowledge of prefabricated chunks so as to facilitate the teaching practice of cultivating students' awareness and understanding of the role of prefabricated chunks in English expressions, raising students' awareness of the use of chunks, and encouraging them to boldly try to memorize, understand, use and transfer the most basic units called prefabricated chunks of English language expressions. This paper takes the cognitive ability of English prefabricated chunks of vocational students as the research object. Through the form of questionnaire survey, the characteristics, existing problems and ways to solve the problems of cognitive ability of higher vocational students were further studied in order to gain insight into the path of English language learning of higher vocational students, and to cultivate students' learning practice habits of memory, understanding, application and transfer of English language with prefabricated language chunks as the smallest unit.

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2. QUESTION DESIGN

2.1.Objective of Survey

The purpose of this survey is to explore the cognitive ability of higher vocational college students on prefabricated chunks. The questionnaire was used to further develop a comprehensive understanding of higher vocational college students' awareness of the construction of English prefabricated chunks and their approach to process English language information.

2.2.Questionnaire Components

The questionnaire designed by the research group mainly includes the basic situation of higher vocational college students, the basic situation of higher vocational college students' understanding of prefabricated chunks, the learning situation of higher vocational college students' English prefabricated chunks, the way of higher vocational college students' processing English language information, the higher vocational college students' understanding of the function of prefabricated chunks, and the application of learning method of English prefabricated chunks in higher vocational college students.

2.3.Survey Respondents

The questionnaire was released through Questionnaire Star in the Class 1, Telecom Grade 22. 69 students should have filled in the questionnaire, but 65 students actually filled in the questionnaire. The filling rate is 94%.

3. RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was published on Questionnaire Star on 14 October 2022 to investigate five specific aspects and produced the following findings of the survey.

3.1.Basic Information About The Students Surveyed

Students in the School of Telecommunications, Grade 22, will take an English grading test prior to taking the Higher Level Public English course, and students with better scores in the grading test will be enrolled in Class A and those with lower scores will be enrolled in Class B. Among the 65 students surveyed in the School of Telecommunications, Grade 22, 44 students are male and 21 students are female, and their English scores belong to the middle and lower level. Among these students, 49.23% come from the college entrance examination in spring, and 36.92% come from the college entrance examination in autumn, which is a relatively high proportion of the students in the college entrance examination.

3.2.The Basic Situation of Higher Vocational College Students' Understanding of Prefabricated Chunks

The survey showed that 90.8% of students had little knowledge of prefabricated chunks and are unfamiliar with the nature, classification, functions and role of prefabricated chunks in the acquisition of English. In addition, The survey showed that 89.2% of students were unaware that 70% of the language people actually use is made up of prefabricated chunks stored in memory. In particular, the survey showed that 89.2% of the students did not know that overall storage and easy retrieval were the main characteristics of prefabricated chunks and 84.6% of students were unaware that prefabricated chunks had more fixed grammatical structure, stable collocation meanings and pragmatic contexts.

3.3.The Learning Situation of Higher Vocational College Students' English Prefabricated Chunks

The survey showed that 73.3% of the students did not pay attention to the learning of institutionalized expressions in the course of their English learning; 66.2% of the students did not pay attention to the learning of phrasal constraints; 64.6% of students did not pay attention to the learning of sentence builders; 63.1% of students did not give high priority to the learning of a large number of fixed phrases; and 61.52% neglected the learning of word collocations.

3.4.The Way of Higher Vocational College Students' Processing English Language Information

The survey showed that 89.2% of the students felt that they were not able to use prefabricated chunks to express their ideas in written English and 87.7% of the students were not able to use prefabricated chunks to express their ideas in spoken English. In addition, the survey also indicates that 86.2% of students felt that they did not use prefabricated chunks to store and extract information in a holistic way to help them understand the main content of listening and 86.1% of students did not use prefabricated chunks to extract and understand English language information in a holistic way, but used grammatical rules to deconstruct, analyse, understand and remember English language information. Finally, the survey found that 86.1% of students failed to consciously use matching, association, substitution and collocation to improve their chunks input; and 80% of students did not enhance their comprehension of texts by identifying prefabricated chunks in short texts.

3.5.The Higher Vocational College Students' Understanding of The Function of Prefabricated Chunks

The survey revealed that 90.8% of students did not use prefabricated chunks in their normal oral and written communication in English, but rather improvised

vocabulary; 87.7% of students did not overcome the influence of negative transfer from their mother tongue through the use of prefabricated chunks. The survey also found that 81.54% of students did not recognise that the use of prefabricated chunks can reduce the difficulty of language acquisition and the threshold of language use, and did not understand that the use of prefabricated chunks can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of English language learning. In the end, the survey showed that 80% of students did not realize that prefabricated chunks play an important role in improving the accuracy, fluency and vividness of language learning.

3.6. The Application of Learning Method of English Prefabricated Chunks in Higher Vocational College Students

The survey showed that 89.23% of the students were accustomed to thinking in their mother tongue and could not express their thoughts with prefabricated chunks such as fixed sentence patterns and phrases. It also indicated that 86.2% of the students usually used translation software to find the Chinese meaning of unfamiliar words or chunks, rather than using corpus (such as COCA, SKELL) to find its application in real context. What's more, the survey revealed that 81.5% of the students did not memorize phrases, idioms and sentence structures as a whole; 80% of the students did not consciously set aside time for learning prefabricated chunks in their learning plan; 80% of the students did not actively try using English prefabricated chunks to improve their English learning effect; 75.4% of the students did not often use the new vocabulary, phrases, idioms, sentence structures, etc. 73.4% of students usually used to translate word-for-word when reading English, rather than translating as a whole with fixed phrases, idiomatic collocations, sentence structures, etc.; 75.38% of students did not consciously accumulate new phrases, idioms, sentence patterns, etc. when watching English movies or programmes on TV.

4. SURVEY ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Through the results of the above survey, the understanding and the application of prefabricated English chunks of higher vocational college students are basically known, and the main problems are as follows: Higher Vocational college students do not know much about the inherent connotation, classification, function and essential characteristics of prefabricated chunks. Therefore, they fail to focus on learning strategies and methods of prefabricated chunks during their daily English learning process; Students did not consciously pay enough attention to learning institutionalized expressions, phrasal constraints and sentence builders; Higher vocational college students do not have a deep understanding of the cognitive degree of prefabricated chunks and do not realize the important role of prefabricated chunks in English language expression. In the process of oral and written English expression, students are used to being passively affected by the

mother tongue thinking, and using improvised words instead of making flexible use of prefabricated chunks to form words into sentences and connect sentences into paragraphs to complete the expressions of their ideas. Therefore, teachers should take the following pedagogical measures to improve students' awareness and ability level of using prefabricated chunks.

4.1. Focusing On Explaining the Classification of Prefabricated Language Chunks And Clarifying the Characteristics of Each Classification

In the questionnaire survey, it is found that students do not understand the meaning and classification of prefabricated chunks, especially in their daily English learning process, so it is important for teachers to explain to students the inner meaning and classification characteristics of prefabricated chunks. Generally speaking, a prefabricated chunk is a multi-word unit with a certain structure and expressive meaning that is remembered and stored in people's brains as a whole, with the characteristics of prefabricated nature, fixity and ease of extraction. According to the classification of prefabricated chunks proposed by Nattinger and Decarrio, it is generally composed of polywords, institutionalized expressions, phrasal constraints and sentence builders. The so-called polywords is composed of two or more inseparable words, whose form and meaning are relatively fixed, such as: the day after tomorrow; what's more; in other words; on the contrary; Institutionalized expressions consists mainly of conventions and popular expressions such as proverbs, maxims social conventions, such as Actions speak louder than words; Success means one percent inspiration plus ninety nine percent perspiration; Phrasal constraints are those where one part is fixed and the other part can be filled in and replaced according to the context, e.g.: be aware of ---; a victim of ---; Sentence builders are also sentence structure frames, in which the corresponding contents can be filled in to express various meanings, but some of the constituent meanings must remain the same. For example: sth keep in mind that---; Not only ---but also--. Through the teacher's explanation, students can clarify the concept connotation and understand the classification characteristics of prefabricated chunks, which lays a theoretical foundation for students to identify, understand and apply prefabricated chunks in the future. As a result, Students are able to introduce themselves using prefabricated chunks. For instance: I graduated from the University of Washington in 2020, with a bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. Since then, I worked at two different companies as a marketing assistant. And I'm also an avid reader, so I'm really interested in working in the publishing industry.

4.2. Building a Task-Driven Teaching And Training Model for Using Prefabricated Chunks Based On the Platform of Intelligent Cloud Vocational Education

First of all, teachers use the platform of intelligent cloud

vocational education as a forum for students' language training, guided by Production-Oriented Approach. Before the class, teachers will release driven tasks on the platform of intelligent cloud vocational education and ask students to complete the output tasks. After that, teachers receive students' project work through the platform of intelligent cloud vocational education, evaluate and analyze students' use of prefabricated chunks in the driven tasks, and let students understand their own confusions and problems in learning and using prefabricated chunks, and use these concerns as a focus for teaching in class.

Secondly, in class, teachers carry out facilitating teaching around driven-tasks. In the process of facilitating teaching of prefabricated chunks, they take steps such as searching, noticing, identifying, understanding, memorizing, using and transferring to guide students to gradually master prefabricated chunks and enhance their awareness and ability to use prefabricated chunks. How will teachers facilitate the students to take a good command of prefabricated chunks in classroom? Above all, in class, teachers guide students to find, pay attention to and identify prefabricated chunks in the text. According to the classification of prefabricated chunks, teachers instruct students to find out the prefabricated chunks one by one in the text, focus on the composition types of prefabricated chunks, and identify and classify them. Then, students are guided to understand the prefabricated chunks and store them in their brains as language reserves. Teachers explain the chunks that students have identified in class through examples to help students understand how the prefabricated chunks are used in specific language contexts and to memorize them according to the types of chunks. Last but not least, teachers organize training exercises in class on the use of the prefabricated chunks and transfer. Meanwhile, Teachers arrange training tasks in class such as selecting words to fill in the blanks and writing short stories in series of chunks to develop students' ability to use and transfer the prefabricated chunks.

Finally, Teachers try to evaluate the quantity and quality of the prefabricated chunks used in students' productive works after class. Using a complete sentence as the basic unit, the quantity of chunk use is calculated, and the quality of chunk use is focused on observing the accuracy of chunk use in students' language output. In terms of a complete sentence as a basic unit, the quality and the quantity of the prefabricated chunk uses are criteria for the accuracy of the prefabricated chunks used in students' discourse.

4.3. Building a Theme-Based Corpus to Develop Students' Autonomous Learning Skills in Prefabricated Chunks

Language learning is a process in which students continue to accumulate chunks of language. In addition to classroom teaching, students' accumulation of language chunks mainly depends on their conscious awareness of the prefabricated chunks learning, mainly

relying on the completion of independent learning tasks assigned by teachers. Teachers provide students with a large number of input discourse materials, including reading materials, audio-visual materials, etc., based on the unit theme of the teaching material. In accordance with the thematic classification of the basic modules in the English Language Curriculum Standards for College students in Higher Vocational Education, teachers should analyze the thematic affiliations in students' textbooks, collect and supplement thematic chunks, sentences, dialogues, articles, audio and video materials on humanistic background, career planning, professional spirit, social responsibility, science and technology, cultural exchange, ecological environment and workplace environment, etc. to build a thematic corpus and extract thematic chunks based on corpus technology. Students are allowed to do independent learning in a thematic way, summarizing the chunks of language they have studied according to topic or function, forming chunk notes and building a self-learning thematic chunk corpus. Students focus on the integrated understanding of the form and meaning of prefabricated chunks of language in the process of independent learning, integrating word learning and grammar learning, with particular attention to the understanding and learning of idioms, phrases and sentence constructions, and storing them as a whole in the brain and training them as the smallest unit of language input, memory, storage and output, gradually developing the habit, awareness and ability to extract the whole at any time during the process of language output. By internalizing the content of the ideas students need to express through the addition of appropriate language, they create new patterns of linguistic thinking in the brain and prevent the negative effects of native language transfer on language use.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The reason why higher vocational college students ignore the learning of prefabricated chunks in subjective consciousness is that they do not have a strong awareness of prefabricated chunks, do not master the basic knowledge of prefabricated chunks and do not realize that 70% of daily English language expressions are made up of prefabricated chunks. Therefore, higher vocational college English teachers should focus on explaining the suggestion on how the prefabricated chunks will be available. Firstly, Teachers should explain the knowledge of prefabricated chunks to students, so that students can understand the classification, characteristics and functions of prefabricated chunks, and pay attention to the input and output learning of prefabricated chunks from the perspective of thought. Secondly, Through a task-driven chunk training model, students are guided to find---notice---identify---understand---remember---use ---transfer the prefabricated chunks they have learned and learn to use the chunks that have a pragmatic function to express their ideas, integrate language form and meaning, and bring language expression closer to that of native speakers of English. Finally, Teachers should guide students to build their own thematic chunk

corpus so as to cultivate their autonomous awareness and sensitivity of chunk learning and to improve their chunk output. Through the chunk-style teaching approach, students are motivated to gradually develop the habits of learning and practice in memorizing, understanding, applying and transferring English language with prefabricated chunks as an admission of the smallest unit.

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