

Study on the Three-dimensional "Chunking" Listening Teaching Strategy for Naval Vocational English

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Abstract. Based on the chunk theory, this paper proposes a three-dimensional "chunking" listening teaching strategy for naval vocational English through extracting and analyzing the lexical chunks of naval vocational English from the self-built authentic listening corpus, which will effectively support the students to understand and master the needs and requirements of their future jobs and professions within a limited time and improve their listening ability for naval vocational English.

Keywords: chunks; naval vocational English; "chunking" listening teaching strategy.

1. Introduction

A chunk, an important unit for language and its use, plays a key role in language comprehension and production. Parley & Syder pointed out that "people make extensive use of prefabricated chunks in natural discourse (spoken or written) to communicate proficiently" [1]. Linguists have statistically analyzed authentic language materials through computers, corpora and other technologies and confirmed that "70% of natural discourse is communicated by semi-fixed 'chunks' which are equipped with words and phrases" [2]. These chunks fulfil different communicative purposes in different genres of text.

Naval vocational English, as a specific branch of English for specific purpose, mainly assists and supports the students' communicating their professional information and knowledge with vocational English in their future occupations and posts. It has been found that its unique lexical, syntactic and structural patterns are distinctively characteristic of "chunks" and easy to extract, which makes chunks an ideal model and unit for researching, teaching and learning naval vocational English. Naval vocational English is also the language-skill basis for improving the students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities in their professional fields, among which it is particularly important and relatively difficult for students to improve their listening level of naval vocational English. The following reasons should be taken into consideration: firstly, the students are unfamiliar with the vocabulary and expressions of naval vocational English; secondly, there may be a lot of noise in the authentic listening materials; and thirdly, the students have not learnt more about the background information and knowledge of their professional subjects. Therefore, this paper, based on the chunk theory, tries to explore the three-dimensional "chunking" listening teaching strategy of naval vocational English which is characteristic of lexical chunks by studying the authentic listening materials of naval vocational English.

2. Definition and Classification of Lexical Chunks

2.1 Definition of Lexical Chunks

Becker first put forward the concept of "chunks" in 1975, and he pointed out that the fixed or semi-fixed patterned language structures are the basic units for memorizing, storing, outputting and using a certain language rather than the single words and these "chunks" constitutes the smallest unit of human communication [3]. Wray considers a chunk as "a string of coherent or disjunctive prefabricated words or other units of meaning, which are stored in memory in a holistic form and can be directly extracted as a whole without grammatical generation or analysis when used." [4] With the help of computer technology and corpus research, Biber, et al. introduced the concept of

word bundles, that is, “multiple sequences of words that are frequently co-occur in different texts” [5].

In this paper, Ma Guanghui’s definition of chunks will be adopted, which defines chunks as “the smallest multiple words combination of form and meaning, which can be used independently to form a sentence or a discourse, and to realize a certain grammatical, discourse or pragmatic function.” [6] This means that chunks are linguistic units in relatively fixed structures that combine syntactic, semantic and pragmatic functions.

2.2 Identification of Lexical Chunks

Chunks have diverse compositions and functions and they can occur as filler words (e.g. you know), simple functional phrases (e.g. pardon me), word combinations (e.g. have a break), idioms or proverbs (e.g. spill the beans, let’s make hay while the sun shines), and long sentence heads (e.g. there is a growing body of evidence that ...). It is difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of chunk, because of its diverse forms and linguistic functions. Different researchers tend to use different criteria for identifying chunks. Overall, these criteria can be divided into three categories, namely (1) identification criterion based on linguistic features, (2) identification criterion based on use frequency, and (3) identification criterion based on learners’ linguistic output.

Wray & Namba suggest that different combinations of criteria need to be used for different research subjects to identify chunks in their language use [7]. Based on the above discussion, in this paper, chunks can be identified in terms of the following criteria: (1) in form, whether they co-occur as a whole in high frequency; (2) in structure, whether they embody syntactic features as a whole; (3) in semantics, whether they express meanings as a whole; and (4) in pragmatics, whether they express specific pragmatic functions as a whole. (5) in usage, whether they embody the mental representation of word combinations as a whole.

2.3 Classification of Lexical Chunks

Since chunks exist in flexible forms and have various uses and functions in discourse, how to classify chunks appropriately has been a real problem for researchers. Linguists and applied linguists have tried to classify chunks from different perspectives, and their studies divide chunks in terms of three criteria: (1) language form; (2) language meaning; (3) language function. These different classification criteria reflect the multifaceted nature of chunk, that is, it is a special and complex linguistic phenomenon that integrates its grammar, vocabulary, function and context together.

Therefore, different linguists have classified chunks from different perspectives. In this paper, Nattinger & DeCarrico’s classification of chunks will be adopted, i.e., chunks are divided into four categories according to the structure of chunks. The first category is polywords, which refers to the fixed phrases composed of several words (e.g. for instance); the second category is institutionalized expressions, which refers to certain sentence chunks that are stored as a whole, including aphorisms, proverbs, maxims, and social formulas (e.g. No problem); The third type is phrasal constraints, in which empty spaces can be filled with aggregated words, thus being highly generative (e.g. neither... nor...); The fourth category is sentence builders, which provide a structural framework for sentences and can be supplemented with constituents to express complete semantics (e.g. It is said that...) [8]. Thus, Nattinger and DeCarrico in their book *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching* suggest that the ideal unit for language teaching is the lexical phrase, i.e., the lexical chunk, and that chunks are the key to second language acquisition and lexical approach is an important method for language teaching and learning so that the teaching programme should focus on the chunking teaching. [8]

3. “Chunking” Features in Naval Vocational English Listening

This paper investigated the vocabulary and expressions of listening texts from the self-built authentic listening corpus of naval vocational English, and found that the vocabulary of naval

vocational English is theme-oriented in real communication, with a relatively limited number of words and relatively fixed sentence patterns. Through further attempts to extract lexical chunks from the Naval Vocational English Listening Corpus, this paper found that there are a large number of thematic lexical chunks in the real-life communication of Navy Vocational English and the overall listening texts show the “chunking” features.

The “chunking” features in naval vocational English listening are mainly shown in the following perspectives.

The first feature is the “chunking” theme. Each theme is relatively independent with a clear purpose, and is basically targeted at a certain task and aim. For example, “meeting at sea”, “collision prevention” and so on.

The second feature is the “chunking” sentence pattern. Each theme may involve relatively fixed sentence patterns and expressions, mainly used for completing the tasks and aims of the theme, and the purpose of communication is clear and direct. For example, your ship has intruded into our territorial waters, please keep clear immediately.

The third feature is the “chunking” vocabulary. A theme has a large number of thematic lexical chunks, that is, the lexical chunks can be used as the basic unit for exchanging information and completing thematic tasks. e.g. Anchor, etc.

4. Three-dimensional “Chunking” Listening Teaching Strategy for Naval Vocational English

Based on the “Chunking” features in naval vocational English listening, the listening teaching of naval vocational English is mainly carried out in three dimensions.

The first dimension is the thematic chunking. According to the needs of the students’ future jobs and professions as well as the specific tasks requirements, the listening themes can be divided in terms of common specific tasks and objectives. In each theme section, the relative background, requirements, and objectives of tasks are described and listed as detailed as possible.

The second dimension is the functional-sentence-patterns chunking. It is necessary to generalize and summarize typical functional sentence patterns for the clear and definite themes to complete thematic tasks and aims. The functional sentence patterns can be complete or semi-complete structures, mainly in the form of formulas, to help learners make effective and purposeful outputs and inputs.

The third dimension is the vocabulary chunking. The thematic lexical chunks and terms need to be extracted in the well-defined themes, the chunk length ranges from 2-6 words, the chunk structures are relatively fixed, and the meanings of the chunks are closely related to the corresponding themes.

With the help of the “chunking” three-dimensional listening preparation for naval vocational English, the students will firstly understand and become familiar with the needs of future jobs and professions and the requirements of the tasks. Meanwhile, the students will be able to have an efficient and accurate prediction of the information and content they may hear after mastering the corresponding functional sentence patterns, which will greatly better their listening effect and effectively enhances their listening ability of naval vocational English.

5. Summary

From a linguistic point of view, naval vocational English has specialized terms and expressions for communicating vocational and professional information and knowledge. In terms of teaching requirements, naval vocational English is a teaching approach that aims to meet the learning needs of the students, that is, the foreign language needs in their future positions. Therefore, the study of naval vocational English will be helpful to the teaching and learning of naval vocational English

courses, and will help students to complete the smooth transition from getting knowledge to acquiring competence of naval vocational English.

Therefore, based on the chunk theory, this paper found that the “chunking” features of naval vocational English provides a favorable theoretical basis and practical support for the “chunking” listening teaching of naval vocational English, which enables the students to understand and master the needs of the future positions and professions as well as the requirements of the tasks in a limited time, improves their listening ability of naval vocational English and builds up their confidence in communicating at sea.

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