

The Application of the Block Teaching Method in Teaching Chinese Vocabulary as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: The approach of teaching language chunks, as an innovative pedagogical method, demonstrates distinctive advantages in enhancing learners' linguistic abilities and facilitating vocabulary acquisition. Learners of Chinese as a second language often encounter challenges such as difficulty in vocabulary retention and low usage frequency, where traditional teaching methods prove inadequate. By instructing vocabulary through fixed collocations and frequently used patterns, the chunk teaching method not only increases learners' vocabulary in a short period but also significantly improves their practical language application skills. This study, grounded in established pedagogical theories and supported by practical cases, systematically explores the application of chunk teaching in Chinese vocabulary instruction for foreign learners. Research indicates that the chunk teaching method can markedly enhance learners' vocabulary mastery and exhibit superiority in practical language use, offering new perspectives and references for Chinese vocabulary teaching to non-native speakers.

1. Introduction

As the process of globalization accelerates, the demand for learning Chinese, an essential language for international communication, continues to rise. However, vocabulary, which serves as the foundation of language learning, often emerges as one of the greatest challenges for learners. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods primarily rely on word lists and rote memorization, neglecting the frequency of vocabulary use and fixed collocations in real contexts, which often leads to significant difficulties in vocabulary retention and application. The chunking method of teaching, on the other hand, addresses this by presenting vocabulary in the form of phrases and fixed expressions, aiding learners in effectively memorizing and utilizing vocabulary, and enhancing their linguistic competence. Through the chunking approach, learners can significantly increase their vocabulary and improve their language expression and communication skills in a short period. This method proves beneficial not only for beginners but also for intermediate and advanced learners. This paper explores the specific applications and effectiveness of the chunking method in teaching Chinese vocabulary to foreign learners through theoretical analysis and case studies.

2. Theoretical Basis of Chunk Teaching Method

2.1. The concept and classification of chunks

A chunk is a basic unit in language learning which refers to common, fixed or semi-fixed word combinations in a language. These combinations contain not only simple words or phrases, but also some sentence types and patterns, reflecting high-frequency patterns and habits in language use. The concept of chunks originates from the way human beings perceive language, and language learners tend to master the practical use of language by memorizing and imitating these chunks, rather than relying solely on isolated vocabulary learning. Chunks can be broadly categorized into several types: fixed collocations (e.g., “carved in stone”), semi-fixed collocations (e.g., verb+noun constructions in “to eat” and “to drink”), and more sophisticated grammatical structures (e.g., the concessive relation “despite but”) [1]. Each category of chunks plays a significant role in language learning. Fixed collocations frequently recur in native speech, enabling learners to use the language more naturally once they have mastered these expressions. Semi-fixed collocations offer a flexible framework for learners to combine language elements freely in different contexts. Complex grammatical chunk structures assist learners in achieving greater precision and fluency in the logical organization of language and sentence construction. The chunk-based teaching method, by reinforcing the learning of these chunks, allows learners to swiftly enhance their language proficiency and communication efficiency through understanding and utilizing chunks, rather than relying merely on vocabulary memorization. This approach is beneficial not only for beginners but also plays a crucial role in improving fluency and accuracy for advanced learners. The introduction of the chunk concept breaks the limitations of the traditional "vocabulary + grammar" dichotomy in language teaching, offering a more holistic and practical pathway for language acquisition [2].

2.2. Principles of the chunking method

The core principle of chunk-based teaching methodology is deeply rooted in an intricate understanding of the language acquisition process. Language is not merely a patchwork of isolated vocabulary or grammatical rules, but a dynamic and coherent system. Chunks, as frequently occurring fixed expressions in language, not only embody its structural elements but also encompass cultural and cognitive patterns. In the process of mastering chunks, learners are not merely memorizing vocabulary but internalizing authentic language usage patterns. The effectiveness of chunk-based teaching lies in its alignment with the brain's natural language processing mechanisms. Humans, in communication, typically do not construct language word by word but rely on pre-existing chunks for rapid processing and generation. This method not only enhances fluency in language expression but also reduces cognitive load, making language learning more natural and efficient. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, chunk learning assists learners in swiftly immersing themselves in context and utilizing authentic Chinese expressions. However, chunk-based teaching is not limited to the mere replication of language forms; it also involves a profound understanding of semantics, pragmatics, and cultural context. Teachers must emphasize the cultural significance and contextual usage of chunks, which not only aids learners in accurate language use but also deepens their comprehension of Chinese culture. Through chunk-based teaching, learners can grasp not only the surface structure of the language but also appreciate the inherent logic and beauty of Chinese, achieving dual acquisition of language and culture [3].

2.3. The application of chunk teaching method in second language teaching

The application of the chunking method in second language instruction has increasingly demonstrated its undeniable advantages. Unlike traditional vocabulary teaching methods, chunking focuses more on learners' overall perception and application of the language. Second language learners often face the dual challenge of vocabulary and grammar, and chunks, as frequently used language units, can effectively aid learners in reducing the complexity of learning and swiftly engaging in practical language use. Through chunk-based instruction, learners are exposed to high-frequency, fixed-collocation language fragments, which not only consolidates language memory but also cultivates an intuitive grasp of the target language. In second language acquisition, chunks provide contextualized language input, allowing learners to acquire the rules and cultural nuances of the target language in specific contexts [4]. Notably, the chunking method can significantly enhance learners' autonomous learning abilities. Mastery of chunks enables learners to gradually develop a capacity for language generation reliant on chunks. This ability not only improves learning efficiency but also makes language acquisition more aligned with real-life usage, reducing the need for mechanical translation and grammatical analysis. Moreover, chunk learning aids in a better understanding and mastery of language coherence, making language output more natural and fluent. In second language teaching, the chunking method is not merely a tool for language learning but also a bridge connecting language and culture. Through chunk-based learning, learners can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural background behind the language, gradually forming a sense of identification and affinity with the target language culture. This dual cognitive engagement with language and culture represents the irreplaceable value of the chunking method in second language education [5].

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Teaching Chinese Vocabulary as a Foreign Language

3.1. Limitations of Traditional Vocabulary Teaching Methods

The traditional approach to vocabulary instruction has long dominated the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, yet its limitations are becoming increasingly evident. This method often focuses on the individual explanation and rote memorization of words, neglecting the holistic nature of language and its practical application. As a result, learners struggle to apply their vocabulary flexibly in actual communication, often merely grasping the superficial understanding without delving into the semantic, collocational, and cultural nuances of the words. In traditional instruction, vocabulary is presented in isolation, devoid of contextual support, which leads to confusion when learners attempt to use the language in real-world situations. The semantics of words are not static but vary across different contexts, a fact that is difficult to convey in traditional teaching methods. Despite memorizing a vast array of vocabulary, learners tend to express themselves awkwardly, lacking the natural fluency required for proficient language use. Moreover, the traditional approach relies too heavily on the repetitive memorization of words, overlooking learners' perception of the language as a whole and the intrinsic logic of language structures. This pedagogical method not only adds tedium to the learning process but also restricts the development of learners' creative thinking, rendering the language acquisition process mechanical and inefficient. In contemporary teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, there is an urgent need to transcend the constraints of traditional vocabulary instruction and seek methods that are more in line with the naturalistic acquisition of language, in order to enhance learners' practical language skills and cultural insights [6].

3.2. The main problems of vocabulary teaching

The primary challenge currently facing the teaching of Chinese vocabulary to foreign learners is the disconnect between instructional content and the needs of the students. A common predicament in vocabulary instruction is the overly formulaic nature of textbooks, which lack flexibility and specificity. This results in learners often feeling disoriented when confronted with authentic communicative situations, struggling to apply what they have learned in class to real-life interactions. The overly homogeneous nature of the teaching content neglects the polysemy and contextual dependence of language, rendering learners unable to use vocabulary flexibly, especially in diverse cultural contexts. Another issue is that vocabulary instruction frequently overlooks the individual differences and background knowledge of learners. Variations in language proficiency, cultural background, and cognitive styles among learners make a one-size-fits-all approach ineffective. Furthermore, the cultural connotations and contextual uses of vocabulary are often simplified in teaching, causing learners to remain at the superficial level of word meanings without a deep understanding of the underlying cultural context and usage rules. This limitation not only confines learners' linguistic expression abilities but also affects their profound identification with the target language's culture. Additionally, current vocabulary teaching models often emphasize short-term memorization over the development of long-term language proficiency [7]. While learners may quickly memorize a large number of words, their understanding of the overall structure of the language remains lacking, leading to awkward and disjointed language output. This issue requires urgent attention and reflection to ensure that vocabulary instruction better serves the practical use of the language.

3.3. Characteristics and Needs of Learners in Vocabulary Learning

Learners exhibit distinctive characteristics and needs in vocabulary acquisition, influenced by multiple factors including linguistic background, cognitive habits, and cultural differences. In the process of vocabulary acquisition, learners must not only grasp the forms and meanings of numerous words but also comprehend their practical usage, context, and cultural connotations. This necessity implies that vocabulary instruction should transcend mere surface-level knowledge transmission, requiring guidance through context and practical application to foster a deeper understanding of the language. Learners demonstrate a strong demand for high-frequency vocabulary and practical application. For beginners, frequently used words in daily life and basic sentence structures become the core of language learning. Mastery of these high-frequency terms can swiftly enhance learners' communicative abilities. Additionally, learners show a pronounced need for collocations and usage scenarios, particularly in complex language environments where fixed expressions and commonly used phrases are crucial. Learners also exhibit a demand for autonomous learning, especially in the information age, where various methods allow them to engage with the target language's usage contexts. This need for self-directed learning necessitates that vocabulary instruction not rely solely on classroom teaching but also provide diverse learning resources and strategies to help learners consolidate and expand their vocabulary outside the classroom. Furthermore, learners' cultural needs are equally significant. Learning vocabulary involves not only mastering linguistic forms but also understanding cultural contexts. Learners from different cultural backgrounds progressively encounter and assimilate the target culture through language. Therefore, vocabulary instruction should integrate cultural knowledge, helping learners enhance their cultural identity and understanding alongside their language acquisition, thus developing a more profound cross-cultural communication competence.

4. Application Strategies of the Block Teaching Method in Chinese Language Teaching as a Foreign Language

4.1. Organization and Design of Vocabulary Teaching Content

The introduction of the lexical chunk approach in teaching Chinese as a foreign language necessitates a reevaluation of the arrangement and design of vocabulary instruction. Traditional vocabulary teaching often focuses on individual words, overlooking the cohesiveness and fluidity of language. In contrast, the lexical chunk approach advocates teaching vocabulary within larger linguistic units, enabling learners to acquire vocabulary in a more natural language environment. Consequently, the arrangement of teaching content must emphasize the integration of vocabulary with context, ensuring that learners grasp the practical application of vocabulary through authentic chunks. When designing vocabulary instruction, priority should be given to the selection and presentation of high-frequency chunks. These chunks not only encompass commonly used vocabulary in daily communication but also include fixed collocations, idiomatic expressions, and frequently used sentence patterns [8]. By systematically presenting these high-frequency chunks to learners, they can master a substantial amount of practical language material in a short period, enhancing the fluency and accuracy of their language expression. The arrangement of teaching content should also consider the hierarchical and progressive nature of chunks. Beginners can start with simple, clearly defined chunks and gradually progress to more complex and polysemous chunks, aligning with the developmental stages of learners' language abilities. Moreover, the selection of chunks should reflect cultural representativeness, allowing learners to gain a deeper understanding of the target language's cultural essence while learning the language. Additionally, the teaching content of chunks should be interactive and engaging, incorporating situational simulations, role plays, and task-based activities to closely link chunk teaching with practical application, thus enhancing learners' participation and motivation. Under this design, vocabulary teaching becomes not merely a transmission of isolated language knowledge but a comprehensive cultivation of authentic language use skills.[10]

4.2. Innovation and Application of Teaching Methods

Within the framework of chunk-based teaching methodology, the innovation and application of teaching methods become particularly crucial. Traditional vocabulary teaching approaches often confine themselves to the mechanical memorization of words, neglecting the practical contexts in which language is used. Although this method may help learners amass a certain vocabulary volume in the short term, it struggles to enhance their language proficiency. The introduction of chunk-based teaching methodology offers a fresh opportunity for methodological reform, with its core focus being the promotion of language application in authentic contexts through meaningful chunk instruction. In practice, educators can integrate chunk teaching with task-based approaches. As learners complete tasks, they must employ specific chunks to express their ideas, which not only deepens their understanding of the chunks but also enhances the accuracy and fluency of their language output. Furthermore, situational simulations and role-playing are effective methods within chunk-based teaching. By simulating real communication scenarios, learners can repeatedly practice and reinforce chunk usage in a realistic language environment, thus achieving a comprehensive improvement in their language abilities. Multimodal teaching is another significant innovation in chunk-based instruction. By incorporating various sensory inputs such as visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli, learners can gain a more holistic perception and understanding of chunk usage. Particularly in the digital age, utilizing multimedia resources such as videos, audio, and interactive software can provide learners with a rich chunk-learning experience, enhancing both the enjoyment

and effectiveness of learning [9]. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize the integration of cultural elements in innovative teaching methods. Chunks often carry rich cultural connotations; thus, educators should guide learners in understanding the cultural significance behind chunks through cultural background introductions and cross-cultural comparisons. This not only aids in vocabulary retention and comprehension but also fosters a deeper identification with and integration into the target language's culture. In summary, the innovation of teaching methods represents both a challenge to traditional teaching models and a key to enhancing learners' vocabulary application skills. Through diversified and contextualized teaching approaches, chunk-based methodology can more effectively develop learners' overall language proficiency, allowing them to navigate real-life communication with ease [11].

4.3. Design and implementation of teaching activities

Within the framework of chunk-based language instruction, the design and implementation of teaching activities represent crucial steps in translating theory into practice. Crafting effective instructional activities necessitates the integration of language chunks with specific communicative contexts, enabling learners to comprehend and apply the chunks in real or simulated environments. The design of teaching activities must consider not only the selection and presentation of chunks but also the interactivity and engagement of the activities, aiming to maximize learner motivation. Instructional activities should be task-oriented, allowing learners to naturally employ language chunks while completing specific tasks. For instance, tasks themed around problem-solving or achieving particular objectives can be designed, requiring learners to use specific chunks during collaboration or discussion [12]. This approach not only enhances learners' mastery of chunk usage but also improves their linguistic flexibility and creativity. To increase the effectiveness of teaching activities, educators can utilize multimodal teaching tools, incorporating various sensory inputs such as visual, auditory, and tactile elements. For example, in role-playing or situational simulations, teachers can employ audio, video, and other multimedia resources to recreate authentic language environments, aiding learners in experiencing and utilizing chunks within contexts. This multisensory approach significantly enhances learners' perception and retention of language chunks. During the implementation of teaching activities, teachers should focus on guidance and feedback, ensuring that learners receive timely and effective assistance and direction [13]. Through interaction between teacher and students, as well as peer collaboration, learners can continuously adjust and refine their use of chunks within dynamic language practices. Additionally, teachers' feedback should address the accuracy, appropriateness, and cultural adaptability of chunk usage, thus helping learners achieve more natural and idiomatic language expression. The essence of chunk-based instruction lies in enabling learners to internalize language through repeated practice in authentic contexts. Consequently, the design and implementation of teaching activities not only embody teaching strategies but also serve as vital means for promoting the comprehensive development of learners' linguistic abilities [14].

5. Conclusion

The application of the chunk-based teaching method in teaching Chinese vocabulary as a foreign language has revealed its unique advantages and broad prospects. By teaching vocabulary in the form of fixed collocations within real contexts, it has significantly improved learners' issues with vocabulary retention and application, enhancing their practical language use abilities. This study not only validates the effectiveness of the chunk-based teaching method in practice but also provides a new pathway for foreign Chinese education. While current research mainly focuses on the elementary and intermediate stages of Chinese teaching, future efforts should extend to advanced

stages and delve deeper into the specific application effects of the chunk-based method across different learner groups. Additionally, teachers should flexibly apply this method in actual teaching, continuously adjusting strategies based on learners' needs to achieve optimal results. The chunk-based teaching method undoubtedly injects new vitality into foreign Chinese vocabulary teaching and merits continued promotion and application in future instruction.

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