

The Teaching of Idioms in Chinese as a Foreign Language Based on Lexical Chunks Theory

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Abstract: Idiomatic phrases are one of the lexical units. Many second-language learners showing great enthusiasm for using idiomatic expressions because of the rich cultural factors inherent in them and the vibrant, hilarious language that is close to life-like. However, the idiomatic terms are so complicated that they frequently cause foreign learners to struggle with learning and comprehending Chinese. With its own advantages, the idea of lexical chunks has the potential to be a game changer in the teaching of idiomatic.

Keywords: Lexical Chunk Theory; Chinese as a Foreign Language; Idiom Teaching

1. Introduction

Idiomatic expressions, which are brief and fixed phrases in spoken language, are generated by long-term selection and processing in the course of human social communication. Because idiomatic expressions are an important aspect of spoken Chinese and contain rich historical and cultural connotations, they are often used to assess learners' oral and idiomatic Chinese level. Learning Chinese idioms can be difficult for some foreign learners who have limited understanding of Chinese culture and are unfamiliar with the Chinese language. This research investigates approaches and tactics for teaching idioms in Chinese as a second language using lexical chunk theory. In terms of research techniques, this paper first outlines the theory of lexical chunks as a whole, then evaluates the challenges in second language learners' usage of idiomatic expressions, and lastly proposes practical teaching measures based on the problems.

2. An overview of chunk theory

According to foreign linguists' research, lexical chunks are words and structures expressed in blocks that appear frequently in spoken language, and are usually composed of two or more consecutive or discontinuous word combinations that are stored in memory as a whole, and can be directly extracted from memory as a whole when used. Lexical chunk theory arose from American psychological research and was introduced into the linguistic category in 1975 by American scholar Becker. It was first used in English teaching when it was brought into China, and it later drew the attention of Chinese teaching researchers, and was gradually applied to teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Lexical chunks have a significant role in the acquisition of second languages because they are integrated and condensed in spoken articulation. In a practical setting, they can be directly pulled from memory as a whole without the requirement for grammatical analysis, but they cannot be divided. For second language learners, the number of Chinese grammar and vocabulary is very large. If we do not rely on lexical chunks to associate and integrate scattered elements, but simply rely on memory, we need a huge amount of work to master grammar and complex vocabulary and sentences smoothly. With their limited memory and processing capacity, second language learners can recognize vocabulary and huge, complex language units with the use of lexical chunks, which makes it easier for them to comprehend, retain, and convey complicated Chinese phrases.

2.1 The use of idiomatic expressions by second language learners

Idiomatic expressions are frequently applied in daily communication and convey complex ideas in a few simple words. Idioms

represent people's customs, lifestyles, and attitudes and contain a wealth of social information. The acquisition and usage of idiomatic expression relies on osmosis for a native speaker who has spoken Chinese as their mother tongue since childhood. They have been exposed to idiomatic expressions since they were young. Idiomatic expressions are close to life, amusing, and implicit for second language learners, thus they always demonstrate a strong excitement for learning and utilizing them. However, they are finding it challenging to learn Chinese because of the complexity and social nature of idiomatic language. The usage of colloquial terms typically causes the following issues for second language learners.

2.1.1 Grammatical errors in idiomatic expressions

The structure of the idiom has a certain stability, the stereotyped structure is usually three-character, but there are also a few for the four-character or six-character structure, such as "show off", "tattling", "high is not low" and so on. At the same time, idiomatic expressions also show some flexibility, which can be extended by embedding words in the middle or before and after, or moving the word order. It is important for second language learners to understand how to manage this "degree".

Second language learners tend to make mistakes in the use of idiomatic expressions. Other elements can be added to the stereotypical structure of some idioms. For example, "pulling an all-nighter" can be said to mean "driving all night for two days", and "playing fast and loose" can be said to mean "playing fast and loose". But some expressions cannot be added, such as "beat a retreat", which cannot be said as "beat a retreat" or "beat a retreat", "to wear a halter", which cannot be said as "to wear a halter". Most idioms can be added or inserted, but almost none can be reduced. For example, in "His boss didn't like him and benched him", the deletion of "cold" in "benched" causes the idiom to deviate from the original.

2.1.2 The semantic deviation of idiomatic expressions

Idiomatic expressions generally contain the surface meaning and the deep meaning derived from metaphor, and we mainly take the deep meaning when using them. The surface meaning is generally understood literally and is straightforward. Therefore, some second language learners tend to remember the surface meaning of idiomatic expressions quickly while ignoring the deeper meaning derived from long-term use, which leads to problems in use. For example, in "We just walked into the market and saw everywhere hanging sheep heads and selling dog meat", the deep meaning of "hanging sheep heads and selling dog meat" is a metaphor for doing bad things in the name of good, with derogatory emotional color, which is inappropriate to describe the market and sellers. In the daily use of idiomatic expressions, it is often difficult for second language learners to take into account all aspects of the Chinese content they speak. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a thinking connection between the surface meaning and the deep meaning, so that second language learners can better understand the deep meaning, smoothly transition from the shallow to the deep meaning, and reduce the mistakes in the use process.

2.1.3 Pragmatic failure of idiomatic expressions

Most of the pragmatic errors of idiomatic expressions are the wrong object, the wrong occasion and the problem of praise and criticism. For example, "I failed this test, will my teacher send me packing after reading my report card?" "Packing" applies to employment, but not to teachers and students.

Idiomatic expressions are short, concise, popular and humorous. They are mostly used in oral and private communication, and are not applicable in more formal occasions or face expressions. For example, "I think this is a recipe for reinvention and suggest a new one." "Reinvention" undermines seriousness and is inappropriate in the context of a workplace proposal.

In addition, the commendatory and derogatory aspects of idioms also deserve the attention of second language learners. Many second language learners always focus on the semantics of idiomatic expressions, but ignore the emotional aspects. For example, "He is sincere and generous, and always tries to make peace when things happen, so his colleagues like him very much", "peacemaker" refers to a person who mediates without principle, with derogatory feelings, which is inconsistent with the context of the sentence which contains praise and praise.

2.2 Teaching measures of idiomatic expressions in Chinese as a Foreign Language based on lexical chunks theory

Many second language learners encounter the problem that even after spending years learning Chinese, they are still viewed as unauthentic when conversing with others. The words and phrases used are one of the causes. Some meanings in Chinese have fixed expressions, so it is necessary to use lexical chunks to make students remember these fixed expressions as a whole, so as to carry out correct collocation. Besides, the lexical chunks imply a specific communicate context, which might aid students in making intelligent word and phrase choices when appropriate. The steps for incorporating lexical chunks theory into idiom teaching are as follows.

2.2.1 Optimize teaching thinking and cultivate block consciousness

Zhou Jian (2007) pointed out that "the important inspiration of the theory of lexical chunks for us lies first in the conversion of memory units to convert smaller words into larger lexical chunks, which can expand the capacity of short-term memory and improve the efficiency of memory". Therefore, in order to reduce the likelihood of student using idiom incorrectly, teachers should not only explain the pronunciation, writing and connotation of idiom but also actively help students find and summarize the lexical chunks in idiom. They should also increase students' sensitivity to the lexical chunks and their fixed expressions.

2.2.2 Strengthen the learning and accumulation of idiom blocks

It is not enough to simply understand a language's grammar principles; you also need to have a specific quantity of vocabulary and lexical units. We can only precisely extract the vocabulary we need and correctly express our meaning if we have a large enough vocabulary. Teachers should therefore encourage students to learn and recite idiomatic language blocks while assisting them in developing the ability to accumulate idiomatic language blocks.

Additionally, when guiding pupils to acquire idiom blocks, proper teaching techniques should be taken into consideration. From the simple to the profound and from the simple to the difficult, instruction should be given. Easy-to-understand and often used idiom blocks should be mastered by students before gradually introducing them to idioms with more metaphors and complex meanings. This will increase student engagement in the classroom and increase teaching effectiveness.

2.2.3 Sort out and summarize idiom chunks

Although there are many idiomatic expressions and their lexical components in Chinese, there are only a small number of prefabricated lexical components for frequently used idiomatic phrases, so we do not need to fully grasp them. As a result, when creating lesson plans, teachers must categorize and describe idiomatic language blocks based on their difficulty, unique context, and frequency of use. For students to understand how to use idiomatic language correctly and more effectively, instructors must also conduct pragmatic training exercises after the class has been explained.

3. Concluding remarks

There have been less studies on the teaching of lexical chunks applied in idiomatic phrases in recent years, despite an increasing number of studies being done to include the notion of chunks in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. Lexical chunks instruction can increase student retention and cut down on errors, making it a particularly practical method for teaching idiomatic language.

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