

Chunking Technique and its Influence on Secondary School Students' Essay Writing Performance

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Abstract

The objective of the research is to investigate the impact of lexical chunks on the writing fluency attainment of second-year university English students. The study seeks to address the following research question to achieve its objective: does instruction on lexical chunks influence the writing fluency of EFL students? Two null hypotheses are also proposed. The initial statement indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) in the writing performance pretest would not exhibit significant variation. The second hypothesis posits that there will be no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the posttest of accomplishment. The results indicate a substantial difference in the post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group after four weeks of therapy. The findings validated the initial premise of the study while refuting the subsequent one. The experimental group attained a score of 76.53, whereas the control group achieved a score of 71.89. This clearly indicates that employing lexical chunks as a language acquisition resource enhances students' writing fluency performance.

Keywords: chunking, EFL students, writing skills, essay, kinds of chunking, vocabulary.

تقنية التجزئة المعجمية وتأثيرها في أداء كتابة المقال لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية

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المخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة تأثير "الوحدات المعجمية (Lexical Chunks)" على تنمية الطلاقة الكتابية لدى طلبة المرحلة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. يسعى البحث للإجابة عن السؤال الآتي: هل يؤثر تدريس الوحدات المعجمية في طلاقة الكتابة لدى طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL)؟ وقد تم اقتراح فرضيتين عديميتين لتحقيق هذا الهدف. تنص الفرضية الأولى على أنه لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة في اختبار الأداء الكتابي القبلي. أما الفرضية الثانية، فنقترح عدم وجود فرق ذي دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات المجموعتين في اختبار الأداء الكتابي البعدي. أظهرت النتائج وجود فرق كبير في نتائج الاختبار البعدي بعد مرور أربعة أسابيع من المعالجة التعليمية، حيث حصلت المجموعة التجريبية على معدل 76.53، في حين حصلت المجموعة الضابطة على 71.89.

تؤكد هذه النتائج صحة الفرضية الأولى، وتدحض الفرضية الثانية. وتشير بوضوح إلى أن استخدام الوحدات المعجمية كأداة لاكتساب اللغة يعزز من طلاقة الطلبة في الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التجزئة المعجمية، طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية، مهارات الكتابة، المقال، أنواع التجزئة، المفردات.

1.Introduction

“Lexical chunks are commonly occurring, fixed or semi-fixed multi-word expressions or sentences that are formed based on meaning rather than grammatical structures, acquired holistically during language acquisition” (McColl, 2013). The lexical chunks method posits that language comprises grammatical lexis rather than lexicalised grammar (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Consequently, much focus must be directed into the investigation of grammatical lexis and the role of lexical chunks in the language acquisition process. Boers and Lindstromberg (2009) assert that numerous studies on lexical chunks indicate their significance for communication and enhancement of language abilities; nonetheless, their influence is particularly advantageous for writing performance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The structure-based method to teaching English descriptive essay writing in the second year at Al-Maymona Secondary School for Boys necessitates that pupils employ grammatical patterns utilising a restricted vocabulary. Moreover, they endeavour to translate segments of their native language literally into English during writing. Consequently, their writings sometimes appear peculiar or somewhat weird, if not grammatically erroneous.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

The research is to investigate how lexical chunks influence the writing fluency process of second-year secondary school students.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

The modern study's relevance derives from the assumption that lexical chunks shape how people acquire language. It improves the communication actions of functioning better in daily life circumstances and helps one to acquire writing fluency.

1.4 Hypothesis of the Study

The first of two null hypotheses put out by the researcher claims no statistical variations in the pretest between EG and CG. While the second one implies that the

mean score of all groups is the same; no statistically relevant variances between EG and CG.

1.5 The Questions of the Study

1. Do lexical chunks have any significance influence Iraqi EFL students' writing fluency?
2. After the treatment, is there any change in the mean score between the EG and the CG?

2. Literature Review

Word units are no longer given much weight in the standard theoretical linguistics texts. Word chunks have the strongest support among applied linguists and teachers, especially those working in the field of second language acquisition. Because it is so difficult to describe precisely, the idea of a lexical chunk is controversial in the field of linguistics. Lexical chunks are not well-characterized by conventional language categories since these categories include pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic information. Another reason lexical chunks haven't gotten much attention in linguistics is that it's hard to provide a simple, all-encompassing definition of them.

The purpose of the study by Ranjbar, N. et al. (2012) was to find out how chunking affected the fluency of writing in essays written by Iranian EFL students. For this reason, 120 TEFL students from Dehloran's Islamic Azad University took an English competency test. Based on their test scores, ninety students were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the control group and the experimental group. Teaching lexical bundles may lead to a dramatic change, according to the study's results. Qian Li (2014) used an empirical study on lexical chunk usage in English writing among undergraduates at Jiaotong University in Jinan, China, to assess the impact of lexical chunks on writing.

The central research inquiry was whether college students' EFL writing enhanced when instructed through the lexical chunk approach. The results following the intervention indicated that the lexical chunk methodology for instruction positively influenced students' written English compositions. The experimental group utilised lexical bundles as a learning instrument.

Chunk studies are predicated on the notion that native speakers are proficient language users who frequently utilise chunks in their daily communication (McCarty & Carter, 2002; Boers et al., 2006; Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). In their discourse on the impact of multi-word strings (chunks) on fluency, McCarty and Carter (2002) echoed the conclusions of Zafarghandi et al. (2017). Research on

classroom chunks indicates that familiarity with prepared chunks can enhance students' fluency in English. Conversely, participants in Zafarghandi and colleagues' study were prompted to utilise chunks throughout the semester upon recognising their benefits.

Movahediyani Attar and Allami (2013) investigated the impact of teaching collocations on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL students, seeking to ascertain the association between the participants' understanding of collocations and their practical use. This study aimed to assess their opinions regarding the instruction of collocations. Research demonstrated that instructing lexical collocation is an effective approach for enhancing collocation knowledge. The students successfully managed their English speaking and comprehended the concepts discussed after understanding the collocations, as per their report.

According to Pawley and Syder (1983), Nattinger and DeCarico (1992), and Wood (2001), the utilisation of lexical bundles and formulaic language units enables second language learners to generate lengthier sentences and communicate more swiftly. The authors of this work argued that students may achieve a natural fluency and extended pauses between words by memorising and automatically recalling a substantial number of language bundles.

This new study examines English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Iraqi secondary schools, focussing on students' lexical competence and the factors influencing its growth and use. The primary objective of the current study is to ascertain whether the proficiency with which EFL students utilise lexical chunks affects their writing. My literature review indicates that no extensive research has examined whether the processing mechanisms employed by EFL students to acquire, remember, and automate lexical chunks affect their challenges with speaking fluency.

3. Theoretical Background of Chunks

In the mid-1970s, Becker and Bolinger initially introduced the concept of chunking or lexical chunks. Chunks, in contrast to phrases, are not tightly interconnected but encompass many grammatical and lexical elements of language structure. Formal sequences, chunks, unanalysed speech segments, formulas, lexical phrases, multi-word units, lexicalised sentence stems, and other English terminology were employed to delineate these notions. Chunks are typically multi-word units characterised by a certain or semi-fixed pattern or structure; thus, we can assert that. The utilisation of numerous words emphasised their common role in speech and created an immediate link to language acquisition (Sailer & Markantonatou, 2018).

A crucial aspect of acquiring a new language is cultivating the capacity to comprehend and utilise its distinct components. These linguistic pieces constitute the initial evidence regarding the perception of the pattern by individuals. The lexical method emphasises the acquisition and utilisation of language in segments. The language production process is not constrained by grammar but instead entails the direct retrieval of integrated lexical units from memory. (Tajino, 2017).

Additional data from research on computer-assisted communication and language acquisition indicates that chunks may serve as the optimal foundational element for language instruction. This transpires for several reasons. Initially, there exists a finite duration during which the human brain can assimilate information. Consequently, we must identify methods to process information more efficiently. In China, college writing examinations typically necessitate that students compose essays exceeding 150 words, with a minimum requirement of 120 words (Murphy and O'Neil, 2022).

Given that students frequently lack sufficient time for thorough contemplation, direct chunk retrieval may prove invaluable. The term "block" serves as an effective mnemonic unit, as it promotes simpler phrase construction and reduces cognitive load during sentence formulation, hence enhancing linguistic fluency. Secondly, utilising fewer linguistic components to construct sentences enhances their quality, thereby dramatically diminishing the incidence of syntactic and semantic errors through the application of the word block. Third, by storing and recovering the complete word block, children with poor language skills would experience reduced stress, so enhancing their confidence in expressing themselves through foreign language. The cognitive learning of chunks constitutes the fourth fundamental of language acquisition. If the overall effect is appropriate, chunked input may significantly enhance memory capacity. Ultimately, word chunk integrates beauty with functionality. To avert pragmatic communication failure, learners of the target language should refrain from actively seeking the right setting while generating their output.

4. The Lexical Approach

In the 1990s, Michael Lewis formulated the lexical approach to foreign language instruction, which is widely recognised as a distinct method. A promising alternative to structure-based methodologies in second language acquisition is the lexical approach, which has recently garnered prominence. The curriculum prioritises enhancing students' skills by instructing them in grammatical lexis, defined as clusters of linked words or chunks. The premise asserts that pupils must

be proficient in both comprehending and generating grammatical lexis or chunks, which are the fundamental components of every language. (Chim and Keck, 2014).

4.1 Taxonomy of Lexical Chunk

According to Crovitz and Devereaux (2016), chunks fall into four categories:

A. Polywords

Structural variants of the English-type specification that consist of fixed phrases with more than one word include: by the way, a piece of cake, etc.; as it were; all in all; and uncommon forms.

B. Expressions of institutions

Examples of this expression type in spoken language encompass entire sentences, phrases with fixed or semi-fixed structures, and phrases exhibiting a fixed combination of pragmatic word functions. Proverbs, aphorisms, and colloquial expressions, such as "How are you doing?" also belong to this group. There was a time when anything was achievable if one desired it sufficiently.

C. Phrasal limitations

It signifies a phrase structure composed of a specific set of words. You may, as necessary, provide the appropriate term or phrase. Such is the case with phrases like "a few days ago" or "a long time ago," as well as the comparative structure that yields "the sooner, the better."

D. Builders of sentences

Primarily in textual communication, it serves as a mechanism for structuring dialogue. It assumes the form of fixed or semifixed expressions with grammatical attributes; appropriate words or sentences may be incorporated as necessary, such as "It is universally acknowledged that ...", "There is no doubt that ...". This classification indicates that, unlike idioms, chunks possess significant flexibility about their structure. Conversely, idiomatic structures are established idioms with fixed forms and meanings that are not discernible from the individual words alone. College textbooks frequently use English idioms and phrases as fixed expressions for student comprehension; nevertheless, the individual components are rarely afforded adequate attention due to their poor integration and multitude. Moreover, the lexical chunks exhibit a clear duality, functioning as both lexical and sentential elements. The flexibility of discontinuous building components complicates pragmatic mastery; nonetheless, they offer versatility in meaning

presentation. Consequently, there exists a plethora of opportunities for educators to assess students' fluency about chunk learning.

4.2 Functions of Lexical Chunks

With respect to the value and practicality of lexical chunks in language instruction, Sbisa (2023) identify three categories: social interactions, required subjects, and discourse device.

1. Lexical chunks help students excel in social interaction and enable them to better express themselves in discussions.
2. Certain required lexical chunks or words that play crucial importance in daily life speech dialogue fill some void.
3. Discourse tools: Lexical chunks have several uses, but one of the most important is their ability to link and integrate phrases or ideas to create a whole concept.

4.3 The Instruction of Lexical Chunks

The lexical method posits that instructing pupils in lexical chunks substantially influences their development and performance. Studies indicate that employing such chunks may improve students' writing fluency (Cowie, 2001). Karlsson (2022) asserts that native speakers utilise lexical components more effectively than non-native speakers. Tavakoli and Wright (2020) assert that native speakers' fluency is attributable to their usage of quotidian language instead of generating innovative structures or meanings. The predominant grammatical lexicon is upheld by native speakers. To attain this objective, educators can enhance writing fluency by implementing a four-step procedure. Assisting children in identifying, constructing, and utilising parts accurately is the initial step. Furthermore, pupils must be assigned assignments or exercises that enhance their learning and comprehension. They will also understand that the key concept is that every contemporary language fundamentally comprises pre-constructed components or established expressions. The second phase commences with the initiation of text analysis. Pupils are assigned to read and study essays. During that period, they will be obligated to identify the different categories of lexical components. In the third step, students must compose a coherent essay utilising their acquired knowledge. The students' performance is evaluated by grading. Here are several potential benefits of use lexical chunks in English composition:

- A. Improve the quality of written English
- B. Make written English more authentic

D. Enhance the ability of conversation to be organized.

5. Methods of Gathering Data

5.1 Method

Experimental methods were employed in the study. A two-group design, including an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG), was used to accomplish this purpose in the present exploratory investigation. For the purpose of evaluating the students' proficiency in English writing, the researcher purposefully used the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and randomly assigned them to either the Experimental Group or the Control Group. The experimental group was instructed using lexical chunks instruction. The EG composes multiple integrated paragraphs addressing disparate themes, after which students disclose their learning experiences and engage with peers utilising lexical chunks during the intervention. They were instructed to benefit from lexical chunks in the development of their works. The CG students received no treatment. They have received the assigned textbook guidance.

5.2 Participants

The second-year pupils of Al-Maymona Secondary School were selected for the current research. Subsequently, one hundred twenty students were selected randomly. They were subsequently divided into two main groups: CG and EG. Each group comprises 60 pupils.

5.3 Instrumentations

The QPT (Quick Proficiency Test), consisting of two components, served as a contemporary assessment designed to evaluate students' ability to recognise and produce collocational proficiency, hence standardising their performance and validating their proficiency level. The second section comprised 20 questions, whereas the first section encompassed 40. To participate in the current study, candidates were required to achieve a score within one standard deviation above and below the mean score. The second technique, utilised as both a pre-test and post-test, was an assessment of lexical chunks. The current research involved sixty candidates, each assessed with scores between 0 and 30, based on 20 multiple-choice questions. The researcher selects the book "English Collocations in Use" by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell. These novels were selected based on 18 units of the previously stated book.

5.4 Procedures

Using Al-Maymona Secondary School's second-year EFL students as a case study, this research will look into how lexical chunks instruction has fared. The Quick Placement Test (QPT) is being used for this purpose by all students. Thirty vocabulary questions make up this test. One hundred sixty-five students take these tests. There will be sixty minutes to complete all of the questions. The goal of this placement test is to find out where the pupils are at in terms of competence. A total of 80 students are selected from 160. Each of the two groups, EG and CG, consists of eighty students. No tests have been conducted on the EG and CG. To do this, each student takes two pretests: one on collocation and one on interview skills. There is a 30-item collocation test that all students must take. The time limit for their response is twenty-five minutes. They need to use the defined collocations to complete the sentences. After that, each student takes part in a brief interview that lasts for fifteen minutes. Within ten minutes, every single pupil has answered the questions. Treatment is administered to the EG students after the pre-test. The most common lexical bits across different subjects are used to guide the EG together with their collocations.

Along with a lesson on Collocations in Use, students in each class examine ten lexical chunks, the majority of which are idioms and fixed phrases. For better understanding, we ask the EG to highlight the lexical components and use them in real-life phrases. The book "Collocations in Use" by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell is divided into modules. Each module helps students expand their vocabulary by introducing them to certain lexical chunks, including as two-word verb phrases, adjective-noun combinations, and idioms. Lessons cover the necessary unit material, and students then use quizzes to practise lexical chunk drills, where they use the lexical chunks they've learnt to create sample sentences and paragraphs. The researcher further emphasises the importance of pupils finishing the exercises found on the following pages of the unit material. Students are expected to carefully go over the lessons, paying special attention to the collocations and idioms, and to use them wisely in real-life sentences after being told about the important chosen vocabulary blocks. The researcher moves on to the next unit of instruction in the following lesson. He comes up with a way to warm up by asking some kids questions about what they have already taught. The researcher chooses lesson plans according to how practical and applicable the content is. The College Writing textbook is simply divided into sections for the CG students to read. Writing proficiency tests were administered to both groups' samples six weeks later. Six basic concerns that may develop in real-life scenarios are to be reflected upon by the students. Examining the students' post-treatment writing fluency with regard to collocations and fixed phrases is the primary emphasis of the researcher.

6. Results of the Pre-test and Discussions

6.1 Pre-test Results and Discussions

According to Table 1, the average score for EG is 54.04, whereas for CG it is 54.33. A t-value of 1.20 was computed with 98 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05, suggesting that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups' pre-test performances. The results showed that both the experimental and control groups started out with very similar and homogeneous levels of writing fluency.

For the EFL writing organisation subtest, Table (1) shows the t-value and significant level in the experimental and control groups before administration.

Group	No. of students	Mean scores	Standard Deviation	D F	t-value		Level of Significance
					Calculated	Tabulated	
CG	80	54.33	10.598	98	1.20	1.987	0.05
EG	80	54.04	11.684				

6.2 Results and Discussions of the Post-test

The researcher administered a post-test at the end of the term to determine if significant differences existed between the EC and CC. The subsequent table emphasises the significant differences in writing performance between the two groups.

Table 2 Comparison between the Writing Fluency of EG and CG on the Post-test

Group	No. of students	Mean	Standard Deviation	DF	T-Values		Level of significance
CG	80	55.76	9.53	98	Calculated	tabulated	0.05
EG	80	64.33	10.31		5.8	2.6	

Table 2 shows that there was a significant difference in the students' post-test scores. The test results are supported by the fact that the experimental group (EG) achieves a mean score of 64.33 points, which is higher than the control group (CG) mean of 55.76. The standard deviations for the two groups are 10.31 and 9.53, respectively. According to Table 2, both the CG and EC groups improved their writing fluency after the intervention, as seen by higher post-test means compared to pretest ones. The EC group showed more improvement than the CG group, nevertheless. After receiving training on the unit topics chosen by the researcher, the students in EG showed an improvement of 10.125 points. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the post-test, with the experimental group demonstrating considerably more progress than the control group. Compared to the control group (CG), the experimental group (EG) performed better on the post-test. As shown in Table 2, the results of the post-test comparison T-test show that the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) are significantly different. So, it's reasonable to assume that there's a lot of difference between the two groups. kids have a large vocabulary, and when lexical chunk training is used in the classroom, kids become even more proficient in using their vocabulary to express ideas and concepts, according to the research. Their writing fluency will improve, according to the post-test. The researcher looks at students' use of lexical chunks in live discussions as well as exam questions. Results from the present study show that teaching EG lexical pieces improves their English competence and fluency. By using these strategies for entering lexical chunks, students can avoid making mistakes while choosing words from a list; as a result, using this approach to writing teaching improves students' language accuracy.

7. Discussion

Questions like these are what this study is aiming to answer:
 Question 1: Does the use of lexical chunks significantly impact the writing fluency of Iraqi EFL students?
 2. Following therapy, did the EG and CG have different mean scores?
 The results of the post-test show that the experimental group's use of a lexical chunks method improved their writing fluency compared to the control group's strict adherence to the textbook units. Games, talks, role plays, paragraph writing exercises, and conversations were some of the activities used to teach lexical item variants, despite the treatment material's limitations.

Throughout the course of treatment, the EG often used idioms and collocations to improve their writing on a wide range of subjects. After that, students talk about the materials and subjects, doing things like collecting data or coming up with ideas with their classmates. Similarly, lexical pieces help EG record varied conversations on researcher-suggested themes. Finally, to combat monotony and energise the session, they engage in role-playing exercises. Students' confidence and vocal communication abilities are bolstered by these activities, which also help them become better writers. Pedagogically, this shift is in line with the goal of improving students' verbal and writing communication skills through the systematic study of large vocabulary chunks and their subsequent natural application in paragraph construction.

The conventional approach has been used to teach them CG. They looked over the college writing textbook that went along with it. No training in lexical chunk teaching has been provided to CG. Consequently, there is little improvement in their writing skills as measured in the post-test. The results show that the experimental group and the control group had significantly different mean scores on the post-test.

8. Suggestions

The following suggestions can be considered when using the lexical chunks instruction in secondary schools:

1. Writing tasks should include several kinds of lexical units taught by teachers.
2. They should also make their students more aware of these lexical items.
3. They should look for relevance rather than burdening kids.
4. Whenever students listen to native speakers—such as listen to the radio, watch TV, read books or magazines—they are recommended to maintain written records of the many kinds of lexical units

9. Conclusion

The research results, corroborated by the average posttest score of the experimental group, show that lexical chunks are vital in enhancing the writing skills of these pupils. Because they do not receive any therapy or lexical chunk education, the control group's performance is comparable to that of the experimental group. It is evident that the current research aims to improve Iraqi EFL students' writing fluency through the use of lexical method. According to the results, exposure to a large vocabulary has a beneficial effect on the development of writing fluency.

When compared to the CG, the EG exhibited higher levels of writing fluency. Of the two, EG is the superior writer. The method of instruction called lexical chunking is responsible for that. This calls for additional research into the usefulness and accuracy of lexical chunks taught in English as a foreign language courses. Thus, taking a lexical chunk approach to EFL lessons may help students become more fluent writers. The lexical chunks of their students should receive greater attention from teachers than just the score study. Vocabulary chunks help pupils utilise English correctly and confidently, according to studies.

Besides, it can be said that lexical chunking is considered as a vital process in teaching and learning English language particularly in communication and conversations, to have natural English language, to be able to use all structures and meanings in situations and conditions. English is rich somehow in two-word combinations such as phrasal verbs or idioms or fixed expressions and proverbs or collocations. So, caring and attending in such topic needs to be highly appreciated on the part of both the learners and teacher\educators or syllabi\curricula designers.

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