



The Application of the Lexical Chunk Approach Based on Information Processing Theory in Business English Vocabulary Teaching in Secondary Vocational Schools

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Abstract— The deepening of globalization and the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative have brought China's trade ties with other countries ever closer. Consequently, there is a growing demand for secondary vocational school graduates in foreign trade who possess business English communication skills. Business English vocabulary, which encompasses both general meanings and specialized business connotations, serves as the linguistic foundation for tasks such as foreign trade negotiations, business email writing, and customer reception in students' future work. Vocabulary is the cornerstone of language, yet current Business English vocabulary instruction in secondary vocational schools largely follows traditional models like word reading and meaning recitation, leading to problems such as fragmented vocabulary memorization, weak contextual application, frequent Chinglish expressions, and students' lack of initiative in vocabulary learning. The Lexical Chunk Approach, which takes prefabricated chunks as the core unit of teaching, can simplify vocabulary output and align with the learning situation of secondary vocational students, who generally have a weak English foundation. Based on the actual classroom practice of Business English in secondary vocational schools and supported by lexical chunk theory, this paper proposes implementation strategies for the Lexical Chunk Approach tailored to the secondary vocational classroom, aiming to optimize Business English vocabulary teaching and enhance students' ability to use business vocabulary.



Keywords— lexical chunk approach, secondary vocational business English, vocabulary teaching, information processing theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization has driven the rapid development of cross-border trade industries. The core goal of Business English programs in secondary vocational

schools is to cultivate front-line, hands-on foreign trade talent, requiring students to master English expressions in scenarios such as placing orders, making quotations, making inquiries, and handling after-sales service.

Business English vocabulary differs from general English vocabulary in its high proportion of polysemy, fixed collocations, and industry-specific terms; memorizing individual words in isolation cannot meet the communicative demands of the workplace.

However, at present, vocabulary teaching in most secondary vocational Business English classrooms still centers on explaining single words. Teachers disconnect vocabulary from business contexts, and students merely mechanically memorize Chinese definitions, making it difficult for them to use words flexibly in conversations and writing. Their output often contains numerous grammatical errors and unnatural expressions. The lexical chunk theory proposed by Michael Lewis regards multi-word prefabricated chunks as the fundamental unit of language learning, breaking the “word-grammar” dualistic teaching system and offering a fresh perspective for business vocabulary instruction. On this basis, this paper explores how to implement the Lexical Chunk Approach in secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classrooms, providing new insights for Business English vocabulary teaching.

II. CORE CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

(1) Lexical Chunks

The theory of lexical chunks was first proposed by Becker in 1975, overturning the traditional belief that “isolated words are the smallest unit of linguistic communication.” It posits that the basis of language output lies in prefabricated language modules with fixed or semi-fixed structures, and that language use relies on holistic retrieval rather than on-the-spot sentence construction by combining words with grammar. Subsequent scholars have continuously refined the theory. In 1983, Pawley and Syder introduced the concept of “lexicalized sentence stems,” broadening the boundaries of chunks to include not only phrase collocations but also complete long sentence patterns. Wray further distilled the core feature of chunks as “whole storage and whole retrieval” of linguistic segments. In 1993, Lewis, in *The Lexical Approach*, established a four-category

classification of chunks: words and polywords, high-frequency collocations, institutionalized expressions, and sentence frames or discourse frameworks, providing a classification basis for the sorting of business chunks and classroom teaching in this study.

In the context of Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools, lexical chunks serve as a key bridge connecting vocabulary recognition and workplace English application. During teaching, teachers can integrate and select specialized chunks around unit business themes and conduct structured vocabulary instruction based on sets of chunks, helping students internalize linguistic knowledge and enhance their English communicative competence in business scenarios.

(2) The Lexical Chunk Approach

The Lexical Chunk Approach, also known as the Lexical Approach, was formally introduced by Michael Lewis in 1993 in *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a New Way Forward*. Its core assertion is that “language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar,” a notion that fundamentally overturns traditional language teaching philosophies and places phrasal chunks at the core of instruction. This approach advocates that teaching should revolve around high-frequency lexical items—here referring to the sets of word combinations that recur in spoken and written business texts and serve as the primary vehicle for ensuring fluent and natural business communication. The Lexical Chunk Approach uses chunks, rather than individual sentences, as the basic units of language learning, and insists that vocabulary knowledge must be taught and learned in authentic contexts.

In the research context of Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools, the Lexical Chunk Approach as defined in this paper involves treating such prefabricated chunks as fixed business collocations, trade set phrases, and foreign trade sentence frames as holistic teaching units. It aims to transform the traditional learning method of rote memorization of isolated words, and to complete chunk recognition and application training within business contexts. This approach can improve the idiomaticity and fluency of

students' business speaking and written email communication, deepen their understanding of specialized vocabulary, achieve long-term retention, and effectively cultivate students' ability to use English in the workplace.

(3) Information Processing Theory of Memory

Robert Gagné was the principal proponent of the information processing model of learning. He systematized this theory in 1974, likening the learning process to a computer information processing system.

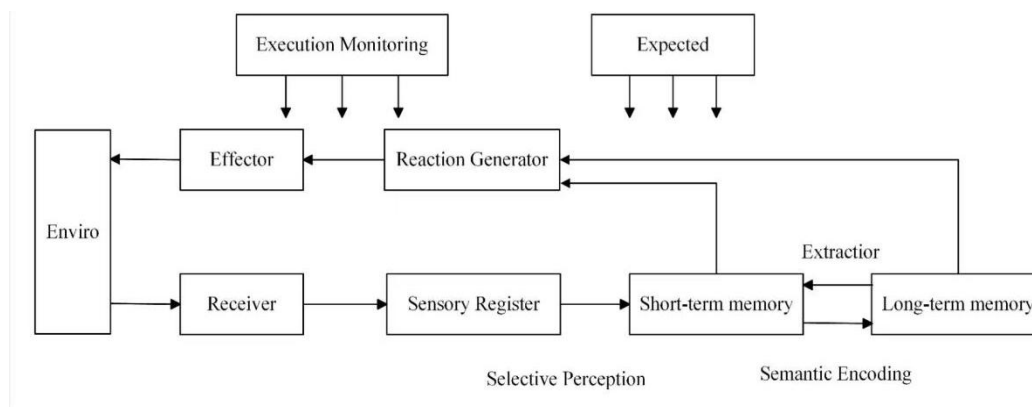


Figure 3-1 Information Processing Model of Learning

The core tenets of this theory are highly consistent with the present study, providing support in two respects. First, the theory posits that learners' working memory capacity is notably limited. Lexical chunks, as pre-formed, frequently used holistic language units, can integrate multiple individual words into a single meaningful whole, thereby achieving information chunking and significantly reducing students' cognitive load during the memorization and output of Business English vocabulary. Second, the theory emphasizes that deep semantic processing must be grounded in specific contexts. Various business communication scenarios can provide complete and meaningful semantic carriers for business chunks, enabling students to understand and apply chunks in simulated situations such as foreign trade negotiations and business document writing, thus avoiding superficial, mechanical learning that consists of merely reciting word definitions.

This study employs Gagné's information processing theory as its theoretical foundation, using authentic business scenarios to achieve deep semantic processing of chunks. Meanwhile, the Lexical Chunk Approach offers efficient language processing units for limited working memory capacity. The combination of the two effectively optimizes students' acquisition of business vocabulary.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

(1) Domestic Research Status

1. General Research on Lexical Chunk Teaching

Domestic research on lexical chunks has developed rapidly since 2000. Wang Lifei and Zhang Dafeng reviewed the progression of overseas research on prefabricated chunks, pointing out that chunks are an effective pathway for overcoming Chinglish and improving productive skills. Duan Shiping summarized domestic research trends, proposing that the research focus would gradually shift to stratified teaching design and empirical comparisons across different educational stages. In the primary and secondary school sectors, Lei Yun and Tang Debin constructed a three-step teaching model of "chunk extraction—contextual understanding—classified storage," demonstrating that classified chunk memorization within thematic contexts can deepen semantic processing. Li Zhiwen designed mind maps to assist in the construction of chunk networks, providing operational activity design ideas for the vocabulary classroom.

At the tertiary level, some scholars have confirmed through teaching experiments that chunk teaching can

expand vocabulary size and improve oral and writing fluency. Empirical studies in primary and secondary schools cover elementary, middle, and high school levels, but the majority of studies focus on general English courses. There is a relative scarcity of detailed research targeting the Business English major in secondary vocational schools, indicating a significant research gap.

2. Research on Business English Lexical Chunk Teaching

Research in Business English has gradually focused on two major areas: business correspondence and oral English. Li Taizhi was among the first to propose a chunk training method for foreign trade writing, emphasizing the enhancement effect of formulaic business sentence patterns on email writing. Qi Yan and Ding Yanren empirically verified a positive correlation between the amount of chunk usage and speaking and writing scores. For the secondary vocational student population, several front-line teachers have conducted small-scale teaching experiments. Some researchers, using secondary vocational foreign trade correspondence courses as a vehicle, proved that chunk teaching can improve the problem of stiff sentence structures in students' emails. Other studies focusing on oral English classes in secondary vocational schools found that chunks can alleviate students' anxiety about speaking.

3. Research on Business English Vocabulary Teaching in Secondary Vocational Schools

Current research on Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools generally points out common teaching challenges: first, students' weak English foundation and prominent vocabulary anxiety, with rapid forgetting through mechanical recitation; second, teachers' rigid teaching modes lacking integration with context and professional scenarios; third, textbooks lacking systematic summaries of business chunks, with monotonous supplementary vocabulary exercises that emphasize isolated word dictation while neglecting collocation and complete expression use; fourth, outdated assessment methods where end-of-term written exams only test isolated word meanings and cannot assess students' ability to flexibly use workplace vocabulary.

Some researchers have proposed optimization ideas: creating business contexts through information technology tools, adopting stratified vocabulary tasks, and building semantic association networks. However, existing improvement strategies rarely integrate lexical chunk theory, failing to utilize prefabricated chunks to reduce the cognitive load of secondary vocational students, and thus find it difficult to fundamentally solve the core problem of "memorizing words but being unable to use them."

(2) International Research Status

1. Research on Lexical Chunk Theory and Teaching

International research on lexical chunks began earlier and has formed a complete theoretical system. Becker was the first to propose the concept of prefabricated chunks, demonstrating that native speakers' communication relies on formulaic phrases rather than scattered words. Wong-Fillmore, through observations in second language acquisition, found that beginners rely on fixed formulas to accomplish basic communication, identifying chunks as a key tool for foreign language initiation. Subsequent scholars further categorized chunk functions, proposing that chunks can significantly enhance language fluency and providing operational ideas for classroom chunk training. A complete vocabulary teaching system was constructed, proposing an "Observe—Hypothesize—Verify" classroom model and clarifying the implementation methods of chunks in listening, speaking, reading, and writing lesson types, which became the core theoretical support for the Lexical Chunk Approach. Ellis, from the perspective of cognitive second language acquisition, verified the value of chunks, with experiments proving that the holistic storage of chunks can reduce working memory load and improve the efficiency of input processing.

Overall, international research emphasizes theoretical construction, cognitive psychological mechanisms, and verification in general foreign language classrooms. There are relatively few empirical studies targeting vocational Business English, and a lack of localized teaching plans adapted for low-proficiency students in secondary vocational schools.

2. Research on Vocational English Vocabulary Teaching

International research on vocational English education generally acknowledges a practical orientation. Nurul Aminatus Zuhriya (2026), through action research in a secondary vocational foreign language classroom, confirmed that chunking strategies can improve students' poor reading habit of word-for-word translation and enhance the efficiency of professional text comprehension. Some scholars, using corpus analysis of high-frequency word clusters in business texts, have pointed out the existence of a large number of conventionalized fixed expressions in business scenarios, where memorizing words alone cannot meet workplace communication needs. However, international research is mostly oriented towards European and American vocational education systems, and the learning situation in domestic secondary vocational schools is different, meaning teaching models cannot be directly replicated.

(3) Research Summary

A synthesis of existing domestic and international literature reveals three major research trends and existing research gaps:

At the theoretical level, the theories of lexical chunks, information processing, and context have formed mature and complete systems. A large body of research confirms that chunks have a significant positive effect on second language vocabulary acquisition and language production, providing solid theoretical support for this study. International ESP research clearly identifies that Business English possesses a large number of high-frequency prefabricated chunks and that vocational teaching should center on formulaic expressions. At the practical level, a wealth of classroom cases on chunk teaching has been accumulated in domestic primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, but the research focus has been on general English courses. There is a lack of systematic empirical research specifically targeting the vocabulary classroom in secondary vocational Business English programs. Existing research on secondary vocational business chunks mostly focuses on writing and oral English specialized courses. The existing gaps are as follows: Existing research has not fully integrated the learning characteristics of secondary vocational students, such as their weak English foundation

and insufficient learning initiative, and lacks a stratified business chunk teaching design adapted to the foreign trade post scenarios of these schools. Moreover, very few studies combine Gagné's information processing theory with secondary vocational business chunk vocabulary teaching to explain the suitability of chunk teaching from the perspective of cognitive load, resulting in a lack of both theoretical and practical classroom support.

Based on the deficiencies of existing research, this study focuses on the secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classroom and designs stratified, scenario-based business chunk teaching strategies to address these research gaps and provide practical references for the reform of vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational Business English.

I. Application Strategies of the Lexical Chunk Approach in Secondary Vocational Business English Vocabulary Teaching

Integrating the learning situation characteristics of secondary vocational students—weak English foundation, high practicality of business vocabulary, and fixed job scenarios—while relying on lexical chunk theory and Gagné's information processing theory to reduce students' cognitive load, a complete and implementable path for chunk teaching is constructed from three dimensions: pre-class chunk resource construction, in-class three-stage teaching implementation, and post-class consolidation and expansion.

(1) Pre-class: Stratified Sorting of Business Chunks

Before conducting vocabulary teaching, teachers need to break away from the scattered word arrangement logic of textbooks. Using foreign trade job scenarios as the main thread, they should integrate all business chunks from the unit and categorize them hierarchically according to students' English proficiency levels. This reduces the amount of information held in working memory at one time, lowering students' memorization pressure from the source.

1. Categorizing Chunk Scenarios by Job Theme

Centered on the core job scenarios of secondary vocational Business English—the seven major modules of

inquiry and quotation, order negotiation, logistics and transportation, payment and settlement, customer reception, business correspondence, and exhibition promotion—systematically screen high-frequency chunks from textbooks, authentic foreign trade emails, and negotiation dialogues. Discard obscure and uncommon professional expressions, selecting only formulaic chunks with high workplace recurrence. Example: chunks for the quotation scenario: quote the best price, FOB Shanghai, offer a reasonable discount, take your quantity into consideration.

2. Three-tier Classification Based on Learning Situation

In light of the polarization of secondary vocational students, a three-tier chunk list is established to achieve differentiated instruction. Basic-tier chunks: simple business collocations such as place an order, make payment, aimed at students with virtually no English foundation and limited vocabulary, enabling them to complete the simplest question-and-answer exchanges in simulated dialogues with teacher prompts. Intermediate-tier chunks: complete business communication formulaic sentences such as We are writing to inquire about..., We would appreciate it if you could..., serving as the core classroom teaching content, requiring students to conduct dialogues and write emails. Advanced-tier chunks: long sentence frameworks for professional negotiations and contracts such as Taking the market fluctuation into account, we propose that..., provided for students with better English who are preparing for skills competitions to expand their knowledge.

3. Creating Supporting Chunk Learning Materials

Based on the stratified chunk list, teachers create two types of standardized teaching resources: first, unit theme chunk mind maps, which use business transaction scenarios as central nodes and branch out to connect synonymous, near-synonymous, and scenario-related chunks, conforming to the brain's cognitive law of chunking memory; second, visualized materials of foreign trade objects, including authentic materials such as price lists, product brochures, and exhibition business cards.

Before teaching implementation, the stratified chunk list is distributed to students for previewing, and any preview difficulties are collected to dynamically adjust the focus of classroom explanation.

(2) In-class: Three-stage Contextual Teaching to Achieve Input—

Internalization—Preliminary Output

The in-class teaching design intrinsically corresponds to the eight learning phases of Gagné's information processing theory. The situational input stage corresponds to the four early processing phases of "attention—expectancy—retrieval—selective perception," aiming to transform business chunks from external stimuli into perceived objects in working memory. The contextual internalization stage focuses on the core phase of "semantic encoding," facilitating deep understanding through organizational and elaborate strategies. The stratified output stage completes the three later phases of "responding—reinforcement—retrieval and transfer," achieving the retrieval, application, and cross-context transfer of chunk knowledge. These three interlocking stages fully implement Gagné's learning process model in the secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classroom.

The following uses a standard 45-minute lesson on "Inquiry and Quotation" as a practical case for illustration:

Stage 1: Situational Input—Chunk Recognition and Extraction (12 min)

Discarding the traditional vocabulary teaching model of word-by-word deconstruction, a complete communicative context is created using cross-border e-commerce webpages, short foreign trade videos, and authentic customer inquiry emails. The teacher assigns text study tasks, guiding students to autonomously identify and mark the formulaic prefabricated chunks within the text.

Sample teaching text excerpt: We are interested in your electronic products. Please quote us your best price FOB Shanghai. If the price is competitive, we will place a large order. After students finish circling the chunks, the teacher reads the complete formulaic chunks aloud and holistically explains their meaning in business

communication, avoiding splitting words for individual definitions. This establishes the cognition that “a chunk is a complete meaningful communicative unit” and circumvents the drawbacks of fragmented memorization.

Stage 2: Contextual Internalization—Deep Semantic Encoding of Chunks (18 min)

Relying on foreign trade communication scenarios, the pragmatic differences of chunks are distinguished, and elaborative semantic processing is carried out. Taking the differentiation of easily confused chunks as an example: place an order is the standard expression for ordering in foreign trade, while make an order is mostly used in everyday dining scenarios, indicating a significant distinction in business register suitability. Synonymous substitution chunks are simultaneously sorted out, such as quote the price / give a quotation.

A semantic network for inquiry and quotation series chunks is constructed using mind maps, dividing them into two major categories: chunks specifically for written correspondence and chunks specifically for exhibition oral communication, clarifying the usage boundaries of different registers. Group classification and discussion tasks are set, where students work in groups to categorize chunks by register, followed by the teacher’s unified error correction and summary. This simplifies complex grammatical explanations and reduces students’ extraneous cognitive load.

Stage 3: Stratified Practice—Chunk Transfer and Output (15 min)

Three levels of classroom practice tasks are set according to cognitive gradients, catering to the developmental needs of students at different levels. Basic training: chunk English-Chinese translation and fill-in-the-blank exercises for short business texts, reinforcing the recognition and memorization of basic-tier chunks. Semi-open simulated communication: pairs simulate a supplier-customer inquiry scenario, requiring the use of at least three core unit chunks in the dialogue. Creative comprehensive output: writing a complete quotation email of about 80 words against the background of market fluctuations. The teacher circulates to observe students’ task completion, providing real-time correction

for chunk collocation and register misuse to complete the learning reinforcement phase.

In summary, the classroom abandons the word-by-word explanation model and conducts deep chunk teaching based on business scenarios in three stages. The first stage, situational input: using foreign trade documents, short videos, and real-world images to create scenarios, allowing students to independently circle formulaic chunks in the text, with the teacher holistically explaining the business meaning of the chunks. The second stage, contextual internalization: differentiating semantic differences of the same word in different collocations based on business scenarios, using mind maps to sort synonymous business chunks, simplifying complex grammar, and focusing on explaining the applicability of chunks in written/oral contexts to reduce students’ memory load. The third stage, stratified output: setting three types of exercises from easy to difficult, with all students completing basic training in chunk translation and text fill-in-the-blanks, the majority carrying out role-plays for inquiry and reception, and those with extra capacity independently writing business emails, progressively achieving flexible vocabulary use.

(3) Post-class: Multi-faceted Expansion and Consolidation to Strengthen Long-term Memory Storage

According to Gagné’s information processing theory, the business chunks briefly stored in working memory during class can only complete deep semantic encoding and be converted into durable long-term memory through repeated recurrence and scenario-based practical application. Therefore, inefficient word copying homework is abandoned after class in favor of lightweight, diversified consolidation tasks aligned with foreign trade positions, deepening chunk retention from multiple dimensions. In terms of written exercises, isolated word dictation is replaced by micro business writing tasks, requiring students to select 3-5 core classroom chunks to write short negotiation sentences or simple business emails, consolidating the chunks in a complete business context. For oral training, students record one-minute simulated foreign trade dialogues in groups, mandating the use of the

chunks learned in class. Simultaneously, a class chunk accumulation notebook is established, encouraging students to excerpt one set of trade-related practical chunks daily. Online learning channels serve as a supplement: teachers upload stratified chunk audio recordings and accompanying self-test exercises to the teaching platform, allowing students to use fragmented spare time for reading-aloud practice and self-assessment, continuously repeating input to delay forgetting. Additionally, the teacher provides 3-5 English titles from cross-border e-commerce platforms or screenshots from short foreign trade videos each week, asking students to circle the chunks within them and imitate sentence creation. Students are guided to actively explore everyday business materials, browse English product descriptions on cross-border e-commerce sites and informative short foreign trade videos, and autonomously collect business chunks from various scenarios, broadening their chunk accumulation pathways and comprehensively achieving long-term memory.

IV. CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of continuously deepening global trade and the increasing market demand for skilled foreign trade talent from secondary vocational schools, vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational Business English programs profoundly affects students' workplace communication competence. The traditional vocabulary classroom, which has long employed the teaching of isolated words, struggles to meet the weak English foundation of secondary vocational students and their practical, job-oriented learning needs. This study, supported by lexical chunk theory and Gagné's information processing theory, systematically applies the Lexical Chunk Approach to Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools.

At the level of teaching implementation, this approach breaks the rigid "word + grammar" teaching logic, conducting chunk input, internalization, and stratified output training based on authentic foreign trade scenarios. By leveraging the chunking effect, it reduces the cognitive load on students' working memory and addresses, from the

root, expressive problems such as Chinglish collocations and stiff sentence structures. From the perspective of student development, formulaic business chunks lower the threshold for language production, alleviate vocabulary recitation anxiety, cater to the stratified learning needs of both struggling and advanced students, and simultaneously improve vocabulary memorization efficiency and contextual application levels, making vocabulary teaching better suited to the learning situation of secondary vocational students.

In conclusion, the Lexical Chunk Approach aligns with the vocational education goals of secondary vocational Business English and can effectively overcome the shortcomings of traditional vocabulary teaching, such as fragmentation and an emphasis on memorization over application. Furthermore, secondary vocational English teachers should proactively update their teaching philosophies, systematically sort and stratify chunks using authentic business scenarios as a vehicle, implement the complete input—internalization—output classroom process, continuously optimize vocabulary teaching quality, and steadily enhance students' business English workplace communication competence, thereby supplying the foreign trade industry with skilled talent possessing a solid linguistic foundation.

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