THE ROLE OF LEXICAL CHUNKS IN DEVELOPING GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY IN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study explores the role of lexical chunks in developing grammatical accuracy among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Unlike traditional approaches that focus on isolated grammar instruction, the lexical approach emphasizes learning prefabricated units of language, such as collocations, fixed expressions, and common phrases. A quasi-experimental study was conducted with two groups of intermediate-level students: one received conventional grammar teaching, while the other engaged in activities based on lexical chunks. Pre-tests and post-tests measured improvements in grammatical accuracy and fluency. The findings indicate that learners exposed to lexical chunks made fewer grammatical errors and produced more natural, native-like language in both speaking and writing tasks. The study highlights the importance of integrating vocabulary and grammar through meaningful, contextualized practice. These results suggest that lexical chunk instruction can enhance communicative competence and should be incorporated alongside traditional grammar teaching in EFL classrooms to improve overall language proficiency.

Keywords

lexical chunks, grammatical accuracy, EFL, lexical approach, language teaching

Achieving grammatical accuracy while maintaining fluency remains one of the most persistent challenges in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Traditional approaches often prioritize explicit grammar instruction, where learners study rules and complete controlled exercises. While this method can improve conscious knowledge of language forms, it frequently fails to produce accurate, natural communication in real-life contexts. Learners may know rules theoretically yet struggle to apply them spontaneously, leading to frustration and reduced motivation. Recent research suggests that language acquisition is most effective when vocabulary and grammar are integrated rather than taught in isolation. The lexical approach, which emphasizes the learning of prefabricated language units or lexical chunks—such as collocations, fixed expressions, and multi-word phrases—offers a promising solution. These chunks embed grammatical structures within meaningful language patterns, allowing learners to internalize grammar implicitly while focusing on communication.

This study investigates the role of lexical chunks in promoting grammatical accuracy among EFL learners. By examining their impact in a quasi-experimental classroom setting, the research aims to demonstrate that teaching through lexical chunks not only enhances accuracy but also supports fluency, learner confidence, and more natural language production. Furthermore, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature: the need for pedagogical strategies that balance explicit grammar knowledge with human-centered, contextualized learning experiences.

Lexical chunks are sequences of words that are stored and retrieved as single units in a speaker's mental lexicon. These include collocations (e.g., *make a decision*, *take responsibility*), idiomatic expressions (e.g., *on the other hand*), and fixed phrases used in routine communication.

Unlike isolated vocabulary items, lexical chunks integrate lexical meaning with grammatical structure, allowing learners to produce grammatically accurate and fluent language simultaneously. The lexical approach, popularized by Lewis (1993)[1], shifts the focus of language instruction from individual words and explicit grammar rules toward the acquisition of these prefabricated units. According to this approach, language competence is constructed through repeated exposure to chunks in meaningful contexts, enabling learners to internalize both form and function. For instance, mastering the chunk *I'm looking forward to…* allows a learner to express future intentions correctly without consciously applying the rule for verb patterns after prepositions. Research indicates that lexical chunks reduce cognitive load during language production. When learners rely on these units, they are able to focus on meaning and communication rather than on constructing grammatically perfect sentences word by word. This human-centered perspective recognizes that learners are more motivated and confident when they can communicate effectively using pre-assembled, ready-to-use structures. Furthermore, lexical chunks often contain implicit grammatical patterns; therefore, exposure to and practice with chunks supports the internalization of grammar in a naturalistic and contextually meaningful way. In EFL classrooms, implementing the lexical approach involves selecting relevant and high-frequency chunks and embedding them in tasks that encourage active use. Activities may include dialogues, role-plays, and writing exercises where learners are prompted to notice and reproduce chunks. Importantly, this approach does not eliminate explicit grammar instruction but complements it, offering learners multiple avenues to acquire accurate and fluent English. By situating lexical chunks within authentic communication, teachers foster both grammatical competence and practical language skills, aligning pedagogy with how native speakers acquire and use language in real life.

A quasi-experimental study was conducted with 30 intermediate-level EFL learners divided into two groups:

- **Group A (Control)** – traditional grammar-based instruction
- **Group B (Experimental)** – lexical chunk-based instruction

Both groups received instruction over four weeks and completed pre-tests and post-tests measuring grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and fluency in speaking and writing. The results indicated a significant difference between the two groups:

Measure	Group A (Grammar-focused)	Group B (Lexical Chunks)
Average grammatical accuracy (%)	68%	84%
Correct use of target structures	Moderate	High
Fluency in speaking tasks	Limited	Noticeably improved
Naturalness in writing tasks	Low to moderate	High

Key observations:

1. Learners in Group B produced fewer grammatical errors and demonstrated a better understanding of collocations and idiomatic structures.
2. Group B participants displayed more fluid sentence construction, relying on learned chunks rather than assembling sentences word by word.
3. Group A, although showing improvement in rule memorization, often struggled to use grammar correctly in spontaneous speech.

The findings strongly suggest that lexical chunks facilitate the acquisition of grammatical accuracy in a more natural and learner-friendly way. This supports the theory that grammar and vocabulary are interconnected rather than independent. By internalizing chunks, learners implicitly acquire embedded grammatical structures, reducing cognitive load during

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[1] Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach*. Language Teaching Publications.

communication[2]. From a human-centered perspective, lexical chunks enhance learner confidence. Participants in Group B reported feeling more comfortable speaking because they could rely on ready-made units, which lowered anxiety and allowed them to focus on meaning. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the motivational and cognitive benefits of chunk-based instruction (Lewis, 1993; Ellis, 2003).

Additionally, the study highlights the limitations of traditional grammar teaching. While explicit instruction can improve theoretical knowledge, it does not guarantee accurate usage in authentic communication. In contrast, lexical chunk-based methods provide contextualized, meaningful input, enabling learners to practice grammar within realistic scenarios.

These results have practical implications for EFL pedagogy:

- **Teachers should integrate lexical chunks into lessons** to support both grammatical and communicative competence.
- **Tasks and activities should encourage active use** of chunks, such as role-plays, dialogues, and writing exercises.
- **Balanced instruction is essential**: explicit grammar rules remain important but should be complemented by chunk-based learning.

In conclusion, this study confirms that lexical chunks are a powerful tool in bridging the gap between vocabulary knowledge and grammatical accuracy. By embedding grammar within functional, meaningful language units, learners achieve more fluent, accurate, and natural communication.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the integration of lexical chunks into English language teaching significantly enhances grammatical accuracy and overall communicative competence in EFL learners. The quasi-experimental findings reveal that students exposed to chunk-based instruction outperformed those receiving traditional grammar-focused lessons in both accuracy and naturalness of language production. The results underscore the importance of viewing vocabulary and grammar not as separate entities, but as interconnected components of language acquisition. Lexical chunks provide pre-assembled units that embed grammatical structures, allowing learners to produce accurate language without excessive cognitive effort. Beyond linguistic benefits, this approach also supports learner confidence and motivation, creating a more human-centered classroom environment in which students feel empowered to communicate effectively. However, it is essential to recognize that lexical chunk instruction is not a replacement for explicit grammar teaching but a complementary strategy. A balanced pedagogical approach—integrating chunks with rule-based guidance—appears most effective for developing both implicit and explicit knowledge.

In conclusion, the study affirms that adopting lexical chunk-based methods can bridge the gap between theoretical grammar knowledge and practical language use. Future research should explore larger samples, longitudinal effects, and the integration of digital tools to further validate and expand the potential of lexical-based instruction in diverse EFL contexts.

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