

Chunking Language in the Perspective of EFL Learners**Jeson A. Bustamante**

Department of Languages and Literature

Cebu Normal University

Abstract:

This study investigated how Chunking Language is perceived by online EFL learners and analyzes how this strategy enriches the learners' vocabulary acquisition and use based on their ideas and experiences in the online classes. The study utilized qualitative research methodology through thematic analysis where in the responses were analyzed descriptively. Interview guide questions were employed to investigate the participants' perceptions and ideas with regard to the use of the strategy. Findings revealed that most of the EFL learners are fully aware of the importance of vocabulary but it was very challenging for them to use it in a sentence. Further, the participants perceived Chunking Language in the module as a vital strategy, essential in language learning and a significant approach in vocabulary literacy. As a strategy it is effective in helping the learners acquire new vocabulary and use these in the appropriate context. The study recommends that the chunking language module be enriched by incorporating grammar and usage in teaching vocabulary and be utilized for more EFL learners.

Key Words: Chunking Language, vocabulary acquisition, EFL learners, instructional module

Introduction

“While without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” (Wilkins, 1972). At present, a person who is learning a foreign language thinks that vocabulary is fundamental and important but difficult. Alqahtani (2015) stressed that the words are considered relevant specially in studying another language. Different words and its definition are given focused in dictionaries and classroom setting. A lot of research indicated that having a lesson in vocabulary is challenging because some teachers are not assured on what strategy they should use in teaching vocabulary. In a global scenario, having much word information can be a strong foundation for learning (Moeller, Ketsman, & Masmaliyeva, 2009). The teaching of vocabulary to foreign learners is given great importance for it is considered as the foundation of comprehension and delivery of their thoughts and ideas. In the Philippines it is evident that there are many foreign people visiting, doing business and studying English as well. With the popularity of Filipino teachers teaching English as a second language, it is considered evidence that the Filipino teachers are capable of teaching foreign students the language. Angco (2001) noted that the Philippine educational system and programs have geared toward proficiency in second language in terms of its linguistic components.

Conversely, as the focus of ESL instruction has shifted from the linguistic approach to communicative approach, learners are challenged to be able to speak the target language. English teachers teach foreign students the aspects that are a great highlight to the language such as vocabularies, grammar, syntax, semantics and a lot more for them to apply it in the skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking with the view of making the language effectively. With the help of technology learning English becomes accessible to foreign learners. They do not need to be here in the Philippines to attend classes or group sessions. It is indeed convenient for them because they can just stay in their respective homes while studying the language through an online application such as skype which can be accessed anywhere at any time. The researcher has been teaching English to online foreign learners for almost four years and has experienced that during group sessions, the students have difficulty in expressing their thoughts because of the limited English vocabulary. It has been observed also that the foreign learners have the tendency to repeat words so that they only remember it and be able to expand the words into synonymous words. In this case, the researcher would like to focus more on the perceptions and views of the EFL students using chunking language in their online lessons. This research explores the experiences of EFL learners in their online classes using the Chunking Language Module. It also looks into the perceptions and ideas of the EFL learners of the Chunking Language in studying English.

Review of Related Literature

The different literatures and studies cited are considered relevant for the research that simply conveys the concept of Chunking Language to be used as a strategy for teaching an EFL learner vocabulary acquisition and use.

An article by Moeller, Ketsman, and Masmaliyeva (2009) indicated that, vocabulary is central to the learning and teaching of a second language. It serves as the passage way in studying the different kinds of oral and written communication. Krashen and Terrell (2000) specified that to be able for a person to share an idea, he or she must use words and make it into a sentence to deliver his or her thoughts. Having much word information can be a strong foundation for learning. In the case of an EFL classroom setting, there can be difficulty in studying relevant vocabulary. The EFL learners find it challenging to acquire the necessary words. Though reading is a perfect way to gather vocabulary it is considered as a big hindrance for them (Moeller, Ketsman, & Masmaliyeva, 2009). Yang, (2014) cited that in a vocabulary learning context, an L2 learner's goal is mainly to gain lexical knowledge through the given task. Davies and Pearse (2000) pointed out that words are essential in constructing sentences. It can cause negative feelings for EFL learners when they realize that the lack of vocabulary knowledge lead them not to communicate effectively the second language which is English (Davies & Pearse, 2000). Cameron (2001) detailed that vocabulary learning is of great significance, and that vocabulary is essential in studying, understanding, and communicating in a language. Learners

understood that vocabulary is vital in successful communication and comprehension. Schmitt (2000) said that vocabulary in language teaching indicated that vocabulary is the most important subject that a learner should acquire. Learning the vocabulary first hand would serve as the basic foundation for a good communicative competence. He identified that without studying vocabulary the purpose of other linguistic knowledge is of no use at all.

Xu and Padilla (2013) argued that one of the prevalent approaches known in teaching is Chunking. This strategy refers to making smaller units of information into chunks. Gobet et al., (2001) said that the process of Chunking depends on the person's awareness, learning, and action when given a task. It has a relation to the environmental motivations and has to do with the focus of a person to achieve a certain goal. Friederici, Bahlman, Friedrich, and Makuuchi (2011) stated that Chunking is an approach that goes with speed and accuracy to the different forms being studied. The approach arranges the subject in a hierarchical manner. After the organization the strategy simply breaks down the long sequences into shorter ones. Then the groupings made will be categorized according to themes to achieve a unified thought. Gobet, Lloyd-Kelly, and Lane (2016) stated that Chunking is also known as parsing. It is a technique wherein words in a sentence are subdivided according to the functions noun, verb and etc. without categorizing its specific role in a sentence. Ellis (2001), detailed that the vocabulary that is familiarized will most likely be helpful in the continuous learning of new words. Jones (2012) believed that chunking what one has learned is advantageous. There can be restrictions to it but it is in some way it is helpful and effective too. For instance pronunciation of words can be difficult but once it is practiced and chunked the production of the right pronunciation of the word can be realistic. In the same vein Arnon and Christiansen (2014) stated that "larger chunks play a role in language acquisition." It is developed overtime in classrooms where it is used in different activities such as writing sentences and pronunciation of words. The research made by Xu and Padilla (2013) showed that strong link between items or chunks can aid retention. It is beneficial in a sense that from simple words there is a relation of difficult words to be remembered by a learner. These findings indicated that association is of great help and the application of prior knowledge activates maximum retention.

These are some of the literature and studies gathered which are related to the approach of chunking. These are deemed related as these provided explanations on the importance of studying vocabulary when one needs to learn a second language.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative design. In this qualitative approach the researcher used the case study in investigating the participants' perceptions and ideas with the regard to the use of the strategy of Chunking Language in their acquisition and use of vocabulary and how Chunking Language contributes to the written English proficiency of online EFL learners.

Thematic analysis was used as means to determine insights and knowledge of the students after gathering their responses. This study was conducted online with the use of Skype an online application to contact students and to have a class with them. There were four (4) EFL learners which composed the research participants, three Japanese and one Iranian as the school where the researcher was affiliated allowed him to have four students only. The researcher made his own module to be conducted during the online classes. The module as a research instrument in this study was composed of ten lessons with different themes and was validated by language experts and curriculum developer. The use of survey questionnaire was also employed to be able to gather information that relevant for the study. The interview took place when the students finished their series of lessons in the Chunking Language Module.

To ensure ethical issues are considered, the study went through some processes. To address ethical concerns, the researcher made the participants received the informed consent form through their emails to establish privacy and confidentiality and trustworthiness of the data. The researcher provided the students with the relevant information that included the benefits and risks of their participation in the study. It was emphasized that since their participation is voluntary, they can withdraw their participation at any time of the study. The consent further elaborated that there is no known risks involved and that their participation is a big help in contributing better understanding of the chunking language being studied. The researcher made it certain that the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the information shared will be protected. Neither the participants' names nor other personal information will be kept confidential. All information related to the personal aspect of every informant was handled with utmost care and confidentiality. In the aspect of trustworthiness, the researcher maintained objectivity throughout the participants' interview and kept the notes in a safe place. The researcher also asked the participants to review the notes taken by the researcher after the interview in order for them to see and validate.

Findings

During the interview the EFL learners expressed their ideas about Chunking Language and the use of the module in their English lessons. The following present the themes based from the responses and perceptions of the EFL learners. Verbatim quotations of the participants' utterances taken from the interview were also presented.

English for Global Competence

The main purpose of studying English language was for the foreign learners' to communicate with other nationalities and having the knowledge to speak the English language will be of great advantage for them in various purposes such as traveling, social interaction and communicative competence. Job promotion and stability also appears to be one of the significant

reasons for the respondents to study English. It was a big deal to improve their English communication skills based on their different aspirations and motivations. Naved (2015) averred that with the ability to use English in communication, you can most likely go around the world. English is now considered as an international language and to that foreigners or travelers find it easier to ask for help. Speaking the English language can be a key to business opportunities as well. The following utterances support the idea.

Participant A stated: "At first, I need to improve my English language because my job, because I need English language in my job. Second, my purpose is because the English language is the international language and if you learn it you know this language, you can speak everywhere. This why I want to improve my English language."

Participant B stated: "Umm, the purpose, I want to talk with the other countries people and I am so curious other country's life style and language and everything that is why I want to know the language"

Participant C stated: "Umm, why? Because I want to talk to you, like you and foreigner, traveler and foreign traveler, speaking, talking. And if I go to travel I want to speak English."

Participant D stated: "I study English because I had to go to United States, and right now I came back to Japan so but still I wanna study English because I don't want to forget what I learned."

Accessible and Flexible Online Learning

The participants chose to study online because it is indeed convenient for them. Online learning seems to be most preferred by the respondents since it is flexible where they can choose their own time to study without sacrificing their tasks at work and accessible enough since they can study anywhere without experiencing traffic if they chose to study in a face to face class. This is corroborated with the study conducted by Jang (2015) when studying a language is much accessible because of the use of technology. At present using all sorts of social media is of great assistance in learning the second language. It offers an easy access to learn the English language because the students can use application to contact the teacher and have it like an actual class.

Participant A stated: "Because study online, for example if I wanted to learn offline, I should go to institute and you know it has a lot of traffic and I waste a lot of time. This is I guess study online is this point is so important for me and then in institute their teacher is Persian and but in online class, I can choose the Filipino teacher they are English, they are native and that will be helpful."

Participant B stated: "Why? It is easy to take a lesson if I have a time.(laughs)"

Participant C stated: "Online? Is, why? Because, face to face, we can do face to face and speaking and we can speak, ah, we can do conversation and I think maybe it's not expensive."

Participant D stated: "Ahh, since I came back to Japan I did not have the chance to talk in English so I wanted to have opportunity to speak specially speak that is why yeah I study online."

Chunking Language as Preferred EFL Strategy

Based on the answers, the participants prefer Chunking Language because the teacher explains the meaning of the vocabulary. Moreover, the participants believe that limiting the vocabulary enrichment to certain number or chunks of words is effective for them as it promotes retention and better understanding of the words. They prefer chunking language strategy of the teacher in teaching English vocabulary. Abrantes, et al., (2006) indicated that teachers are the one responsible in molding the minds of their learners. Educators become the bridge that simply connects what the learners need to be knowledgeable at. For this reason it is of great importance that both the teachers and students become one in achieving a certain objective. The number of words is controlled to seven words only. In this case the limited number became leverage for the student to retain the words in their minds.

Participant A stated: "I like this part. That part explain with the word. That was so nice for me because the teacher told you okay for example, we had a seven word here and the teacher will divide the seven to the small group and the teacher will explain the word and then you have to make your own sentence with the word."

That was so helpful. No, this um good for me. After ten days you will learn seventy words and hundred days you will learn seven hundred words it's enough for me."

Participant B stated: "Umm, Chunking Language, it means like...Umm, I think it is enough for me to remember, seven vocabulary if I to have ten or more, it is not good or easy for me to remember. For seven chunking words it feels like it is focusing with the words. Yeah yeah."

Participant C stated: "I like the best, chunking? Easy and I can remember, I don't remember but I can remember. If I can use more in here maybe I will remember soon."

Participant D stated: "Okay, say again Best or the at least? Difficult question. It's a good way to study because I can't remember a lot of words only one time"

Essential in Language Learning

Generally the participants' found the strategy essential in studying English. It was mentioned that it can be helpful in their daily life especially at work and in the future. As cited by Cameron (2001) vocabulary learning goals is of great significance, vocabulary is essential in studying, understanding, and communicating in a language. Learners understood that vocabulary is vital in successful communication and comprehension. Thus, having goals in teaching helps language teachers in planning lessons and adapting tasks for their students. These goals would assure the achievement of the target language.

Participant A stated: "That really helpful. You know I had that some unique so special word in to every seven word such as "to tell you the truth, good evening and common use".

Participant B stated: "Yes it is really helpful. The words are use in working, it is more helpful."

Participant C stated: "Helpful? Yeah. Chunking Language helps me? I am not sure I don't use it my life just only you now so, but Chunking... yeah maybe future helpful"

Participant D stated: "Ummm. I think it's helpful but you said that people can remember seven words but I actually I couldn't remember some words so I think yeah actually we have to study just having class is not enough, I feel I need to review."

Strategic Vocabulary Literacy

It was realized that a review every after each lesson should be made for maximum retention of the vocabulary being learnt. Thornbury (2002) said that recurrence of words is very useful and effective. If the words are repeated constantly to the students there is a higher chance of remembering the word. In this way the student will retain the vocabulary that can be useful and applied in the future. The number of words given on each lesson which is only seven is enough but for the strategy to be more effective a constant review can be made to be able for the students to retain the words on their respective mind. It was noted that during the class the teacher tried to pull the students to share their ideas on the vocabulary covered and push them to write sentences that will help them remember the words given on that lesson. Jones (2012) believed that chunking what you have learned is advantageous. There can be restrictions to it but it is in some way helpful and effective too. For instance pronunciation of words can be difficult but once it is practiced and chunked the production of the right pronunciation of the word can be realistic.

Participant A stated: "Yes, that was so helpful for me but if the written use the last vocabulary in the next lesson, that will be so helpful. For example, if today we have the seven word and then for next day for next lesson, If I read the passage

and then in passage like a review. Yes, for example in new passage and then when I wanted to read that passage and then there were some vocabulary about the last lesson and it will go into my mind.”

Participant B stated: “Yes the strategy is enough for me. After the topic I can use the in my life, how should I say, in my daily life, I can use it and in working too. The most time I use of English is in working. I want to know the conversation. Yeah and casual.”

Participant C stated: “Yeah, it is enough. Enough for or too much. Seven is too much for me. For me 3 to 4 words are enough. 7 is okay.”

Participant D stated: “The strategy is the chunking??? Yes, yes but as I said we need review and also I have to continue.”

In reference to these findings, it shows that the EFL learners perceived the Chunking Language positively and treated it as meaningful learning strategy for studying English relative to the generated themes presented in the research findings.

Conclusion

In the light of the findings of the study, it is concluded that Chunking Language is a vital strategy in for the EFL learners as they perceive it very essential in language learning and a significant approach in vocabulary literacy. Further, it fulfilled the participants’ motivations in studying English through online lessons as well. Chunking Language is indeed effective in helping the learners acquire new vocabulary and use these in the appropriate context.

Recommendations

Grounded on the findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended to enrich the chunking language modules to allow more opportunity for EFL learners to review the vocabulary learned, integrate grammar and usage in teaching vocabulary and use the strategy to more online EFL learners.

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