Impact of Lexical Bundles on Chinese L2 Learners’ Oral Proficiency

Corey Ketring  
*Brigham Young University*

Rachel Yu Liu  
*Brigham Young University*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jur

*Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons*

**Recommended Citation**


This ORCA is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Impact of Lexical Bundles on Chinese L2 Learners’ Oral Proficiency

June 21, 2019 by Admin

Corey Ketring, Rachel Yu Liu, Asian & Near Eastern Languages

This study examined the efficacy of formulaic language in improving the fluency of Chinese in second-language learners. Formulaic language refers to a group of words that is cognitively stored as one linguistic unit, rather than being analyzed by each independent part (Simon, 1974). For instance, if one were to witnessing something shocking exclaim, “oh my goodness!”, you are exhibiting formulaic language. Because we do not use typical rules of grammar to analyze formulaic language, it is likely that we can process it much more quickly (Wray, 2002). Wray et al also suggests that it is an important part of developing fluent speech (2008). Furthermore, more formal speech is riddled with formulaic language. If you are giving an oral presentation in a formal setting, there are certain organizational expectations for the presenter. Usually, a presentation will have some sort of introduction, and a conclusion. Additionally, it is expected that the presentation flow fluently from thought to thought. The presenter may begin with, “In recent years, such and such phenomena has developed”. “In recent years” is used to introduce a trend that the speaker wishes to elaborate upon. They may then transition into the core of their presentation. They may follow with, “The key contributor to this phenomenon can be broadly categorized by…”. The phrase “can be broadly described by” functions as one linguistic unit. To most native speakers of English, these phrases are fairly intuitive. However, second-language learners struggle to use these phrases effectively. This study aims to use formulaic language to assist English speakers studying Chinese as a second language to improve the quality of oral presentations in professional and academic contexts.

Formulaic language is a useful tool for second language learners because these units are generally processed as one idea. Wray et al suggest that this property allows them a degree of automaticity (2008). As students try to utilize their syntactic knowledge with their developing lexicon, it is easy to make mistakes and rely on already-known phrases. We hypothesized that if students were given access to a greater range of phrases that communicate certain reoccurring themes in presentations, it will help them present complex ideas more clearly and with fewer errors, pauses, and dysfluencies.

In our initial experiment, Professor Liu developed an Chinese Academic Formulas for Presentation (CAFP) list with various examples of Chinese formulaic language in different contexts. Professor Liu created the phrasebank based on published research articles and oral presentations from various academic genres (e.g. natural sciences, humanities). Within the CAFP list, phrases were organized based on the communicative function of the phrases. Examples of these functions include: “Introducing the main topic”, “Explaining causality”, “Defining Terms”, and “Listing and Classifying Information”. With the first group of students, we presented the students with the CAFP lists as a supplementary resource for their studies. After giving the students the CAFP lists, they were encouraged to use them in throughout their classroom activities and were given additional exercises meant to improve their awareness of correct contexts and accuracy of use. A mixture of exercises were provided, including fill-in-the-blank and group oral assignments. A qualitative analysis of this group’s oral presentations did not illustrate any significant improvements. We modified the original approach by developing a more interactive experience for the second group of students. With these students, we introduced them to the Chinese Academic Formulas for Presentation (CAFP) list at the beginning of the semester and measured their progress every week. In this period of time, the students were exposed repeatedly to the bundles. There were six criteria that were measured to determine the quality of the students’ presentations: speed rate, the frequency of pauses, percentage of correct AS units, percentage of correct words, the complexity of vocab, and length of AS
units. AS unit stands for ‘speech unit’ and refers to an independent clause and all associated dependent clauses, and measures the syntactic complexity of spoken discourse. Results from a paired t-test analysis revealed significant improvement. There was a significant improvement in both the speed rate and length of AS units (represented by a p-value less than 0.05). Their complexity of vocab showed meaningful improvement, but the p-value of .143 did not meet the threshold of statistical significance.

Improved speed and complexity are both important characteristics while giving presentations. Thus, the results suggest that there is an increased fluidity after a short period of exposure to formulaic language. The students also exhibited increased accuracy, but the results were not statistically significant. Our observations suggest that repeated exposure to the lexical bundles is essential to enact significant retention with the learners. Furthermore, it was qualitatively observed that students who were more open to the additional exercises achieved greater mastery. This suggests that attitude is also an important factor in language acquisition.

FILED UNDER: ASIAN AND NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES, COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ORCA-2018