

## Teaching politeness in English using Lexical Chunks

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Note<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*This study illustrates the theory of politeness and serves the importance of politeness in our life. Politeness has been practiced as etiquettes and a better way to show manners in society. It is a very important gesture in interaction and communication. A polite and well-mannered person are likely to be appreciated and chosen by others. So, in order to get ample benefit in personal as well as professional front, one has to know the norms of politeness. In this paper, different situations of politeness are shown, strategies are there to reduce face threatening effect. The study stresses on to teach politeness by using the lexical chunks. The six maxims of Leech can be learned through chunks, each maxim identified with its related lexical chunks so that learners can easily understand the maxim and after that they can form the sentences as well. Further, the study elaborates how chunking can be a beautiful combination of ELT and Pragmatic Studies.*

*Keywords: Politeness Principle, chunking, ELT, Pragmatic Studies.*

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## Introduction

Chunking is an approach of learning in which one can learn more efficiently by using short- term memory. In chunking the longer lesson is broken into units or chunks so that it can be learned and comprehended easily. The smaller chunks are easier to remember therefore it reduces the cognitive load to process information. The most common examples of chunking are phone number 8084901725 if we see these 10 digits number, we may not remember it, but if we break this into chunks 808 490 1725 it looks easy and after reading twice or thrice, we may remember this. Neuroscientist Daniel Bor (2012), author of *The Ravenous Brain: How the New Science of Consciousness Explains Our Insatiable Search for Meaning*, says chunking represents our ability to ‘hack’ the limits of our memory. As compared to the traditional method, chunking method will come out as resolved, time saving and efficient method of teaching – learning. In traditional methods of teachings, one has to learn long formulas of grammar, certain rules are there to follow and it takes long duration of time to master in their respected field.

This paper focuses on the politeness in English. Politeness is very important to maintain interpersonal relationship in society. It varies from culture to culture and society to society. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines politeness as

“Behaving in the way that is socially correct and shows awareness of and care for other people’s feelings.”

Politeness is a part of our lives; we sometimes use politeness strategies consciously and sometimes subconsciously. A business organization uses politeness strategies for customer behaviour control. This study is based on the teachings of politeness in English using chunking methods by applying pragmatic approach. It could be a very meaningful endeavour to combine chunking with pragmatic approach. There are a number of approaches of politeness in pragmatic studies and I have chosen Leech’s politeness principle for this study. Geoffrey Leech provided clear rules of politeness through six maxims.

#### Literature review

A lot research has been done in the area of chunking methods of teaching and politeness theory separately. I have reviewed some articles for this study, these are as follows:

“The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information” published in Psychological Review in the year 1956. George Miller of Harvard published this paper and introduced a term “Chunking”. Miller after a series of cognitive load experiment claimed that an average person can handle seven pieces of information in short term memory, at a time.

The concept Cognitive loading is all about restrictions of our mind. Researchers Paul Chandler and John Sweller wrote extensively on the implications of Cognitive Load Theory in the area of instructions and learning.

Richard E Mayer gave segmenting principles of learning, which states that: “people learn better when a complex continuous lesson is broken into separate segments”. Examples include breaking a complex figure into two or more smaller figures dealing with different parts of the original one; presenting one graphic at a time rather than putting multiple graphics in the same figure or breaking a continuous presentation into short chunks that can be faced by the learner.

Nahk-Bohk Kim (2008) worked on current issues in teaching English Chunks and discussed the methods and strategies for the learners in terms of the lexical approach.

Graham D. Bodie, William G. Powers and Margaret Fitch- Hauser has worked and examined an innovative method of teaching basic skills necessary to effectively produce and receive messages while reducing the potential for misunderstandings. The study is based on Chunking; primary and active learning that enables students to integrate information into their memory and skill base.

David A. Morand published a paper in the Journal of Organizational Behaviour, title “Language and Power: An Empirical Analysis of Linguistics Strategies Used in Superior- Subordinate Communication”. This paper illustrates the theory of ‘politeness’ into the domain of organizational studies.

Dr. Braj Mohan (2010) from EFL University has worked on Politeness study in the Languages used by business bodies for customer behaviour control. He gave theoretical grounds of politeness study, and analysed using the model of Brown & Levinson.

After review of related literature and research work, we can say that chunking is an effective way of teaching. So far, we have seen, chunking method has been applied in teaching English and language learning. Chunking method has also been used in teaching basic skills to the students. We have reviewed some papers that advocates politeness as effective tool for organizational behaviour. Politeness principles are beneficial in business and customer's behaviour control. We have understood the importance of politeness and effectiveness of chunking method of teaching. As there has hardly been any research with special focus on teaching politeness in English using lexical chunks. Chunking method is a teaching tool and it can be used to enhance learner's ability. I have chosen chunking methods to teach politeness in English using theoretical approach of Leech's politeness theory. It would be a beautiful combination of ELT and Pragmatic Studies.

#### Theories of politeness

Politeness theory emerges from Erving Goffman's concept of face in the article *On Face Work*. Goffman produced the term face which according to him was maintained by the audience rather than the speakers. Later some major models of politeness came into existence by renowned linguists like Lakoff, Leech, and Brown & Levinson.

Lakoff stated that "Politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction." Lakoff's Principles were influenced by Grice's Cooperative Principle. Lakoff re-examines Grice's principle and gives three maxims of politeness: Don't impose, give options, and make the receiver feel good (Fraser 219-236).

Brown and Levinson influenced Goffman's notion of face and they unfolded the face into two divisions i.e., Positive face and Negative face. Positive face is related to the desire to be appreciated and a negative face is related to being independent or autonomous. They developed Face Threatening Act (FTA) which advocates Negative face threatening act and Positive face

threatening act. In Negative FTA, privilege of actions is interrupted to harm either the speaker or the hearer. Positive FTA is a common example of disapproval, insult, criticism, etc. Positive face is threatened when an individual does not care about the feelings of the person in front of him.

Politeness strategies: Brown and Levinson gave politeness strategies through which one can reduce face threatening effects. The politeness strategies are of four types:

1. Bald on record: This strategy is mostly used in situations where participants are in close relationships such as family, friends, etc. When there is little or no desire to maintain their faces, there is a possibility that the audience will be shocked or embarrassed by the strategy used with the person we are not familiar with. For example- 'Do the dishes, it's your turn'.
2. Positive politeness: This strategy is used to minimize the threat of the receiver's positive face and make them feel good. In this case, interlocutors know each other very well e.g. 'Are you all, right? Can I do something for you?'
3. Negative politeness: This strategy is used to minimize impositions on the listener's face. It presumes that the speaker will be imposing on the listener e.g. - 'Could you pass the salt please?'
4. Off- record: This strategy is used generally in indirect language and removes speakers from the risk of being imposed e.g. - 'It is cold inside, isn't it?' The speaker is indirectly asking the hearer to switch off the AC. (Brown and Levinson 8-65).

Leech's model of politeness (1983): Geoffrey Leech gave the 'Politeness Principle' (PP), and introduced six maxims of politeness (Leech 132). They are as follows:

1. The Tact maxims- minimizing cost to others and maximizing benefit to other. Utterance that expresses speaker's intention in future action and expressions that influences the hearer to do action.

2. The Generosity maxim- this is centred to self, while the tact is to other.

For example- 'you should join us for dinner'

In this case the speaker implies that cost of the utterance is to his self. Meanwhile, the utterance implies that benefit is for the hearer.

3. The Approbation maxim- this maxim occurs in assertive/ representative and expressive.

For example- 'fantastic movie it is'

'Isn't it?'

This is an expressive utterance, includes the approbation maxim.

4. The Modesty maxim- this is similar to approbation maxim. Both concerns to the degree of good or bad evaluation of other or self are uttered by the speaker.

5. The Agreement maxim- this maxim occurs in assertive, there is a tendency to maximize agreement between self and other and minimize disagreement between self and other.

6. The Sympathy maxim- it is a condolence expression. This maxim explains to minimize antipathy between self and other and maximize sympathy between self and other.

In reducing Face Threatening effect, we can use both Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness. In Positive politeness we generally rescue the hearer's positive face by reducing the distance to the hearer. In negative politeness, the speaker continues to be the hearer's negative face by valuing the hearer's personal space (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Negative politeness

considers being less threatening than positive politeness because of closeness between speakers.

Use of lexical chunks in politeness

Geoffrey Leech has given six maxims of politeness; we can learn it through chunks. Following are the examples of maxims using lexical chunks:

1. The Tact maxim: This maxim is offering options in order to minimize the effect of a request.

Lexical Chunks: Could you do this? May I say something? Excuse me please, would you mind if.,

Sentences:

- Could I take your time?
- May I say something?
- Excuse me, could you please tell me how far the station from here?
- May I know your name please?
- Would you mind if I use your pen?

2. The Generosity maxim: This maxim focuses on the speaker; others should be valued more than self.

Lexical Chunks: You must rest, let me do this, no worry about it, don't bother.

Sentences:

- You must take rest for a while.

- No worry I will solve the problem.
- Let me do this for you.
- Don't worry I will do the dishes.
- You must come and have breakfast with us.

3. The Approbation maxim: It focuses on praising others, if not possible then remains silent.

We can identify this maxim with full of admirations, praises etc.

Lexical Chunks: you are a genius; you sing well, he is a great painter.

Sentences:

- I saw you reading at night, it seems you were enjoying the book.
- I know you are a good singer would you know how to play piano?
- Thank you so much for the birthday present aunt, it was so very thoughtful of you.
- You are a great painter; I want to thank you for accepting my invitation.
- You are a wonderful cook; the food is so delicious.

4. The Modesty maxim: This maxim is found in self-dispraising situations. The criteria are minimizing praise of self or maximize dispraise of self.

Lexical Chunks: I'm so stupid, what an idiot I'm, I am nothing in front of you.

Sentences:

- Oh, I'm so stupid – I forgot to bring money.
- What an idiot I'm, I didn't attend our lecture.

- I am nothing in front of you, you are a genius.
- Please accept this small gift as a token of our love.
- I am so stupid; I didn't attend the important class of math's.

5. The Agreement maxim: The main criteria of this maxim are to minimizing disagreement between self and other, maximizing agreement between self and other. The agreements are shown through direct expressions. This is applicable in assertive; it seeks agreement and avoid disagreement.

Lexical Chunks: I want you to be.., this needs to be done.., I want you to focus.., definitely good/bad

Sentences:

- I want my student to be punctual.
- This assignment needs to be completed before the vacation.
- I want you to be focused in your life.
- We have wasted our time; the exhibition was not very good.
- Definitely it was a good event.

6. The Sympathy maxim: This maxim can be found in polite speeches such as, congratulate, condolence, showing grief. It minimizes antipathy between self and other; maximize sympathy between self and other.

Lexical Chunks: Alas, sorry to hear about, sad to hear, so sorry, thinking of your family with love.

Sentences:

- Alas, what a terrible incident it is.
- I am sorry to hear about your uncle.
- I was saddened to hear that your grandfather passed away.
- We are so sorry for your loss.
- Thinking of your family with love, I want to help you in any way I can.

Above are the examples of Lexical chunks systematically used in maxims of Politeness. The purpose of this paper is to theorizing Politeness in brief and summarizes Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle. Use of Lexical Chunks is emerging as a teaching technique in second language education. The analysis emphasizes how lexical chunks can be meaningfully used as a teaching technique.

## Conclusion

This paper asserts about chunking and how it could be relevant as a teaching tool. We have gone through the Politeness theories in brief in this paper and talked about important authors like Lackoff, Brown and Levinson, Geoffrey Leech who gave eminent contribution in this area. This study analyses that chunking could be a very appropriate tool for teaching; we can say that it could be a very effective method when combined with Pragmatic Studies. Through lexical chunks politeness can be enhanced and impoliteness can be reduced. Chunking assures accuracy of a learner, improves fluency in less amount of time, it allows easy retrieval of information and does not load on our memory. We can say that chunking could be very productive method of teaching- learning when combined with pragmatic approach.

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