Improving Vocabulary Knowledge, Reading Comprehension, and Reading Fluency through Chunking

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Chunking is the grouping of words into meaningful units. The ability to process text in units larger than the single word is vital to the development of reading fluency and comprehension. With a language like Chinese, where there are no explicit markers of word boundary in the written text, it is even more important for the reader to develop the ability to segment both words and combinations of words.

This paper describes an instructional approach for improving Chinese vocabulary knowledge, text comprehension, and reading fluency through the use of chunking. The approach consists of five basic elements: (1) detailed vocabulary lists created on the basis of level-appropriate text, (2) targeted multi-word units culled from the text, (3) explicit instruction of the word units, (4) repeated silent and oral reading of the text containing the word units, and (5) assessment of knowledge of the word units, oral reading, and text comprehension. This approach has a strong focus on lexical development, with special attention paid to collocations and formulaic expressions. It scaffolds student learning by providing them with detailed word sheets and explicit explanations of word meanings and uses. The ultimate goal is to enable the learner to acquire a robust vocabulary, including knowledge of both words and word combinations, thereby achieving good comprehension and reading fluency. Specific steps in implementing this approach are delineated, and student feedback on the approach is also reported.