



## APPInep E-Newsletter no. 6—November 2016—Back to School

### Lexical Chunks

#### Introduction

Chunking and lexical chunks have become ‘buzz words’ in English language teaching recently. In this short article I hope to show what they are, why they are important in teaching and provide some ideas on how to practice chunks in the YL classroom.

#### Why chunks?

The study of corpora shows that somewhere between 25% and 50% of what we say and write is composed of chunks of language, these being recurring sequences of two, three or four words.<sup>1&2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As our mind appears to store lexical chunks and

process them as wholes, they serve as ‘ready to go’ pieces of language which allow learners to become more fluent, allowing them to become more effective communicators.<sup>3</sup>



#### Examples of chunks

- **Set phrases.** This can be the classroom language you encourage learners to use e.g. *Sorry, I don't understand*, or *Could you repeat that please?* Alternatively it could be the language the teacher uses e.g. *Sit down please*, *See you next week*, the chunks children learn from the repeated language of stories, or the functional language they use in café or shop roleplays e.g. *How much is that?*

- **Semi-fixed expressions.**

**I ♥ English** Expressions such as *It's a wet/stormy day* (It's + adjective + day), *I love English/spaghetti* (I love+ noun), or *Have you got a pen/sister?* (Have you got a +noun).

- **Collocations.** This is often the language from stories and rhymes e.g. *a beautiful, sunny day*, *the big, bad wolf*.

Another good reason to teach language chunks is that it is believed that after repeating chunks, learners unconsciously start to ‘unpack’ them,

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focusing on the patterns of language and filling the slots with other expressions, thereby allowing them to express their own meanings.<sup>4</sup>



### Learning chunks

After telling a story where you have encouraged learners to join in with the repeated language, write or project a part of the story on the board and read chorally with students. While continuing to read the section chorally, make the chunks you want to focus on disappear, then give out the chunks on card to groups of students, who have to stick them in the correct place. Next, provide learners with a worksheet where they have to choose the correct chunk to complete sentences from the story. Lastly exploit semi-fixed expressions by asking students to complete some gap-fill sentences e.g. He loved his white shoes so much, I love my \_\_\_\_\_ so much.



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<sup>1</sup> Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

<sup>2</sup> Erman, B., & Warren, B. (2000). The Idiom Principle and the Open Choice Principle. *Text* 20(1), 29-62.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, P., & Kryszewska, H. (2012). *The Company Words Keep*. Peaslake: Delta Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Kersten, S. (2015). 'Language Development in Young Learners'. In Janice Bland (Ed.), *Teaching English to Young Learners* (pp.129-145). London: Bloomsbury Academic.

## Let's play, play and PLAY!

### PART 1

Young learners love to play. They love to play games, to role play, to play and sing songs.

Through games they can have lots of fun but at the same time they are learning in a natural way, growing and developing their emotional, social and language skills among others. Games bring people together and research through the years has proven that play has a fundamental role in the development of a child as a whole. There are lots of benefits when playing games with children. In fact, it's been said that "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation".



Still, as teachers, and in order to make a game work well when we're planning it, we need to keep in mind: **the classroom layout (Part 1)**, **the instructions (Part 2)**, **the materials and resources (Part 3)** and **the game-playing language (Part 4)**. If any of these factors are not thought out carefully, any game, no matter how experienced you are, can turn into chaos.

Our article is therefore divided into four parts, each one explaining a bit more about these factors and why they are so important. Complementing each one, some of our favourite games, that we often use in our classes and are truly enjoyed by children.

**Classroom layout** has a big impact on the activity you're planning. Make sure that you can see all



children, that they can see you, that they can see each other and that you can move around the room to monitor the activity. The classroom dynamics improves

dramatically if you can change the layout or if you can even go outside.



**Cheerleaders** is a group game that we came across in Carol Read's book. You'll need some pictures of cheerleaders, flashcards with the images or words you want the students to spell and Cheer pom poms.

Show the props (Cheer pom poms) and ask them if they know what they are. Explain and demonstrate the game to your students. Check understanding and organise the class in two groups.

Each team must have at least one "speller", five elements to shout the letters and the word and, depending on their level, a writer. Give the props to the "speller" and distribute others to the rest



of the team. If there is a writer, this student should be on the board prepared to write the word. Play the game first with one group and then with the other. Teacher shows the "speller" a flashcard with a word or a picture on it (for example PEN). The "speller" must spell the word to the members of the

team saying: "Give me a P"; the members need to repeat the letter raising the cheer pom poms and shouting back: "P". If there is a writer, he/she writes the letter on the board.

This procedure continues till the end of the word. In the end, the members must spell the word, raising the cheer pom poms and saying the word. The teacher gives a point if the group spelled the word correctly and an extra point if the word was correctly written on the board. The game-playing language involved could be: Give me a/an...; How does it spell...?; It's my turn; Can I have the Pom Poms?; It's correct/ Well done/ Try again; Something/ a letter is missing.

You can apply this game when revising the alphabet or, for instance, to create a cheerleaders

group to support the class in a sport activity. Kids will love it.

**Stay tuned for the next edition of this E-Newsletter where we'll share more games with you. Remember to... PLAY!**

Bibliography:

Read, Carol. *500 Activities for the primary Classroom*. Macmillan Publishers for teachers, 2007.

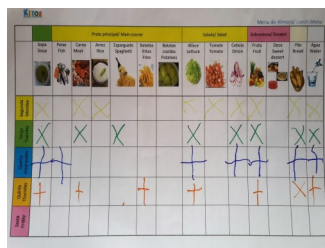
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## Our lunch menu

When I started going to the preschool classroom a whole new world appeared to me. Soon I realized children can teach us a lot of things.



In one of the lessons children suggested saying in English what they had for lunch. Their suggestion was accepted

and we started doing it regularly. They had the routine of telling the preschool teacher what their lunch had been. First we did it only orally, but after a while I started writing down what they had had.

Nowadays our routine has changed a little. They have a table were the helper of the day crosses and orally describes this meal. A lot of vocabulary and structures are covered every day. But they also practice their short term memory, communication skills and healthy and unhealthy food.

This has been a very successful activity and it came from them doing it.



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