Formulaic Language and Fluency: ESL Teaching Applications
Formulaic Language Terminology

• Formulaic sequence
  – One such item

• Formulaic language
  – Non-count noun referring to these items

• Phraseology
  – The study of formulaic language
As many as 40 labels...

- Lexical phrases
- Phraseologisms
- Prefabricated language
- Multiword strings
- Set phrases
- Wordstrings
- Prefabricated routines
- Idiomatic language
Common characteristics

• Multiword
• Mentally stored and produced as if single words – processing shortcut
  – Short term memory and cognition limits
• Particular meanings
• Particular functions, eg. Excuses, invitations, sarcasm, discontent, refusal, acceptance....
Categories

• Idioms
  – Noncompositional – meaning is greater than the sum of the words
  – *Let sleeping dogs lie, take 5, by and large*

• Phrasal verbs
  – Verb + preposition combinations
  – Literal and/or figurative meaning
  – *Look up*

• Routine formulas
  – For social interaction purposes
  – *How are you, I’m sorry for your loss, happy birthday*
Lexical bundles

• 3 or more words
• Identified in a corpus
• Frequency cutoff
• Range of texts
• Serve particular discourse functions
• **Stance**
  – Certainty, attitude, modality
  – *The fact that, we wish to discover, let’s determine, can be used to*

• **Discourse**
  – Relationships among parts of discourse eg. introducing new topics, elaborating or extrapolating
  – *Is known as, in the case of*

• **Referential**
  – Refer directly to temporal, spatial, physical context
  – *Is proportional to, is the sum of, is connected to, in parallel with*
What is Fluency?

- Key words: smoothness, flow, comfort, speed
Research Evidence

• 3 key elements of fluency:
• Speed (syllables per minute)
• Pauses and hesitation
  – Amount
  – Frequency
  – Location
• Length of runs
  – Number of syllables produced between pauses
Pause Trivia

• Native speakers tend to pause **inside** clauses, sentences and phrases maximum .5 seconds
  – To select a noun, verb, adjective or adverb
  – For emphasis
  – To breathe
• Native speakers tend to pause **between** clauses, phrases and sentences maximum 2 seconds
How does formulaic language help fluency?

• Provides a “ready-made” piece of correct language
• Allows more speed etc.
• Allows speaker to sound “native-like”
What About Formulaic Language?

• Theory: having formulaic language helps fluency
• Can you be fluent using words and grammar construction only?
• Using a set of 2 or more words as if one word is more efficient
• Automatized
• Remembering a whole chunk of words means your speech has:
  – Faster speed
  – Less hesitation
  – Fewer pauses between clauses and phrases
  – Longer runs
Research Evidence

- My project
- 11 ESL students
- 6 months full time study in Canada
- Homestay
- Retold film plot every 6 months
• Results:
• Faster speech
• Less overall hesitation
• Much longer runs
• Use of formulaic language within longer runs
• Conclusion:
• They acquired formulaic language and used it to be more fluent
Uses and Functions

• Students used formulaic language in many ways to be fluent
  1. Repeating a formulaic sequence
     *After that - after that - after that*
  2. Used several together to extend a run
     *And then he ran away and kind of made an escape*
  3. Relied on one formulaic sequence
     *Came back*
  4. Self talk and filler
     *In English - I think - let’s see*
  5. Rhetorical use
     *And then - after that - the first thing that happened - once upon a time*
Teaching FL for Fluency

• Attending to input

• Interaction
  – Student to student
  – Student to teacher/native speaker

• Production
  – Preparation
  – Practice
  – Feedback
Vocabulary-style strategies

• Ethnographic
  – listen and watch for FL in the environment
  – List them
  – Interpret meaning and function
• Mark FL in a text or on transcript
• Compare L1 and L2 ways of expressing things
• Replace single words with FS
• Cloze, where FL has been removed from a transcript
• Describe or narrate using FL
Specific Activities

- Shadowing and tracking
- Mingle jigsaw
- 4/3/2
- “class photo” (Gatbonton & Segalowitz 1988)
- Marketplace
- Messengers (Nation 1989)
  Chain dictation
- Student dictations
- Chat circles
Oral Process

- Spontaneous
- Shaped
- “portfolio” assignments
  - Model + practice + feedback
- Formal
  - Rehearsal
  - Use of eg. Shadowing to prepare
Fluency Workshop

- Input stage
  - Model analysis
- Automatization stage
  - Shadow
  - dictogloss
  - Mingle
- Practice/production stage
  - Prepare your own talk
  - 4/3/2
- Free talk stage