

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