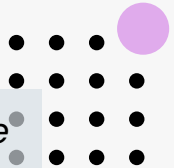# "Is this a Formulaic Sequence?"
Applying a set of criteria to potential target wordstrings

Verdú, Ma. Angélica, Zinkgraf, Magdalena & Valls, Lucía Soledad

J040 Secuencias formulaicas en leyendas y canciones: enseñanza–aprendizaje de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en escuelas primarias y secundarias

Formulaic Language

"*strings of letters, words, sounds [...], contiguous or non-contiguous, of any length, size, frequency, degree of compositionality, literality/figurativeness, abstractness and complexity, [...] that necessarily enjoy a degree of conventionality or familiarity among (typical) speakers of a language community or group, and that hold a strong relationship in communicating meaning.*" Siyanova-Chanturia & Pellicer-Sanchez (2019:5)

meaning of the string cannot be derived from the meaning of its component words

Formulaic Sequences

*Conventionalised strings of **more than two words** which frequently fulfill specific **communicative functions** and form a **unit of meaning** - Wray (2002)*

- Overlap with and inclusion of other categories like 'prepositional verbs' or 'idioms'
- different theoretical backgrounds
- The name they are given is irrelevant.
- IMPORTANT!!! their recurrence in the language as phrases sharing characteristics in the definition and their potential to convey meaning

Which wordstrings could qualify as FSs?

A. Count on me (Mars, 2010)

1 If you ever find yourself (stuck in the middle of the sea)
2 I'll sail the world to find you
3 If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see
4 I'll be the light to guide you
5 We find out what we're made of
6 When we are called to help our friends in need

B. Remember Me (Iñigo Pascual, 2017)

1 Remember me
2 Though I have to say goodbye
3 Remember me
4 Don't let it make you cry
5 For even if I'm far away I hold you in my heart
6 I sing a secret song to you each night we are apart

C. You are not alone (Joe and Jake, 2016)

1 Heartbeat, when you're not around it's beating slow
2 And it's something that I've never known, oh whoa
3 I'll be, I'll be the answer you've been waiting for
4 I'll be the truth that you've been looking for, oh whoa
5 You're not alone, we're in this together
6 All that you want is right here forever
7 And they don't need to know, oh oh oh
8 And they don't need to know

Which wordstrings could qualify as FSs?

A. Count on me (Mars, 2010)

1 If **you ever find yourself (stuck in the middle of the sea)**
2 I'll **sail the world** to find you
3 If you ever **find yourself lost in the dark** and you can't see
4 I'll be **the light to guide you**
5 We find out **what we're made of**
6 When we are called to **help our friends in need**

B. Remember Me (Iñigo Pascual, 2017)

1 **Remember me**
2 Though I have to **say goodbye**
3 Remember me
4 Don't let it **make you cry**
5 For even if **I'm far away** I **hold you in my heart**
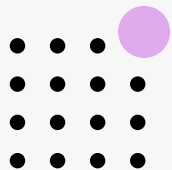6 I **sing a secret song** to you each night **we are apart**

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1 Heartbeat, when **you're not around it's beating slow**
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4 I'll be **the truth that you've been looking for**, oh whoa
5 **You're not alon**e, we're in this together
6 **All that you want** is **right her**e forever
7 And they **don't need to know,** oh oh oh
8 And they don't need to know

Is this an FS?

Teacher: I suspect that, from this stanza, XX is an FS.

- What should I do?

- Which were the defining characteristics of FSs?

- CRITERIA only later in the need to check:

Unit of meaning with a communicative purpose :
ENTRY IN A MONOLINGUAL DICTIONARY

FREQUENCY – COCA

YOUGLISH

FSs from "Count on me" (Mars, 2010)

"Find yourself (stuck in the middle of the sea)" appears in the Cambridge Dictionary online as follows:

Find yourself

To realize that you are in a particular situation or place, or doing a particular thing, when you did not intend to:

Examples:

He'll **find himself** with no friends at all if he carries on behaving this way.

We fell asleep on the train and woke up to **find ourselves** in Calais.

(Zinkgräf, 2022)

List Chart Word Browse +

find yourself stuck in the mic   [POS] ?

Find matching strings   Reset

(HIDE HELP)

Download the corpus (and corpus-based frequency data) for offline use

Corpus of Contemporary American English

SEARCH   ERROR   CONTEXT   OVERVIEW

In searches where each of the "slots" is very high frequency, your search string must not be longer than five words in length.

Corpus of Contemporary American English

| SEARCH | ERROR | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW |

List Chart Word Browse +

find yourself stuck   [POS] ?

Find matching strings   Reset

🏠 (HIDE HELP)

⊘ Download the corpus (and corpus-based frequency data) for offline use

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Corpus of Contemporary American English

| SEARCH | FREQUENCY | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW |

ON CLICK: 📄 CONTEXT   🔄 TRANSLATE (??)   ☰ ENTIRE PAGE   G GOOGLE   🖼 IMAGE   ▶ PRON/VIDEO   📖 BOOK   📖 THESAURUS   (HELP) ▶

HELP		⭐	ALL FORMS 31	FREQ +	
1	ⓘ	⭐	FIND YOURSELF STUCK	31	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
					0.219 seconds

Corpus of Contemporary American English

SEARCH | FREQUENCY | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

List Chart Word Browse +

find yourself ADJ   [POS] ?

Find matching strings   Reset

			ON CLICK:	CONTEXT	TRANSLATE (??)	ENTIRE PAGE	GOOGLE	IMAGE	PRON/VIDEO	
HELP	ⓘ	★	ALL FORMS (SAMPLE): 100 200			FREQ	TOTAL 218	UNIQUE 126
1	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF UNABLE			28	
2	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ALONE			6	
3	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF MISSING			5	
4	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF INTERESTED			5	
5	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF AFRAID			5	
6	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF FACE-TO-FACE			4	
7	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ABLE			4	
8	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF SICK			3	
9	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF STRANDED			3	
10	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF PREGNANT			3	
11	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF INVOLVED			3	
12	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF GUILTY			3	
13	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ATTRACTIVE			3	
14	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF AWAKE			3	
15	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ALIVE			3	
16	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF UNEMPLOYED			3	
17	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ANXIOUS			2	

List Chart Word Browse +

find _ppx ADJ|

pron.REFL

Find matching strings   Reset

Corpus of Contemporary American English

SEARCH | FREQUENCY | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

ON CLICK: 📄 CONTEXT 🅶 TRANSLATE (??) ☰ ENTIRE PAGE Ⓖ GOOGLE 🖼 IMAGE ▶ PRON/VIDEO 📖 BOOK 🔍 THESAURUS (HELP) ▶

HELP	ⓘ	★	ALL FORMS (SAMPLE): 100 200 500	FREQ	TOTAL 1,055	UNIQUE 612 +
1	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES UNABLE	64	
2	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF UNABLE	28	
3	ⓘ	★	FIND MYSELF UNABLE	22	
4	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES UNEMPLOYED	14	
5	ⓘ	★	FIND OURSELVES UNABLE	11	
6	ⓘ	★	FIND MYSELF DISAPPOINTED	10	
7	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES PREGNANT	9	
8	ⓘ	★	FIND OURSELVES ABLE	8	
9	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES HOMELESS	8	
10	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES INVOLVED	8	
11	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES DISAPPOINTED	7	
12	ⓘ	★	FIND MYSELF UNCOMFORTABLE	6	
13	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES ABLE	6	
14	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES ADRIFT	6	
15	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES DEPENDENT	6	
16	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES RESPONSIBLE	6	
17	ⓘ	★	FIND THEMSELVES STRANDED	6	
18	ⓘ	★	FIND YOURSELF ALONE	6	

SEARCH | ERROR | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

List Chart Word Browse +

in the middle of the sea [POS] ?

Find matching strings   Reset

(HIDE HELP)

Download the corpus (and corpus-based frequency data) for offline use

SEARCH | FREQUENCY | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

ON CLICK: CONTEXT TRANSLATE (??) ENTIRE PAGE G GOOGLE IMAGE PRON/VIDEO BOOK THESAURUS (HELP)

HELP			ALL FORMS 44	FREQ +	
1	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA	44	

0.375 seconds

List Chart Word Browse +

in the middle of the NOUN

POS ▶ _pos

Find matching strings   Reset

☐ Sections Texts/Virtual Sort/Limit Options

(HIDE HELP)

ON CLICK: ☐ CONTEXT ⊕ TRANSLATE (??) ☰ ENTIRE PAGE Ｇ GOOGLE 🖼 IMAGE ▶ PRON/VIDEO 📖 BOOK 📚 THESAURUS (HELP) ▶

HELP			ALL FORMS (SAMPLE): 100 200 500	FREQ	TOTAL 16,500	UNIQUE 1,743 +
1	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT	5628	
2	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY	723	
3	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD	633	
4	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET	591	
5	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM	583	
6	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR	218	
7	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT	204	
8	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN	201	
9	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AFTERNOON	173	
10	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIELD	169	
11	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK	156	
12	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COUNTRY	148	
13	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CITY	142	
14	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TABLE	134	
15	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LIVING	116	
16	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK	105	
17	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WOODS	95	
18	ⓘ	★	IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEASON	91	

Youglish

Examples: "**find yourself**"

Number of occurrences: 10.008
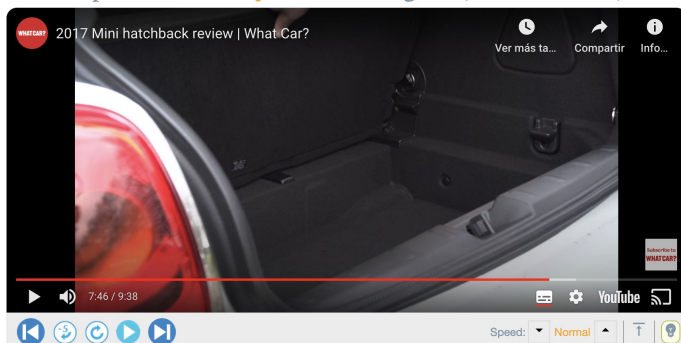
Prosodic characteristics:

- 1 Intonation Phrase that ends in "*yourself*"
- Pause only after "*yourself*"
- Fixed accentuation pattern

/… **faɪnd** jɔːself /

- Coalescence in some cases (phonological process)

/ faɪn**dʒ**ɔːself /

How to pronounce **find yourself** in English (15 out of 9993):

2017 Mini hatchback review | What Car?

loading lip, when putting items in. If you do find yourself in need of more space, then

you find yourself in survival mode,

Number Four: You find yourself feeling guilty often.

For example: you might find yourself procrastinating.

So next time you find yourself in an escalating argument,

Youglish

Examples: "**find yourself stuck**"

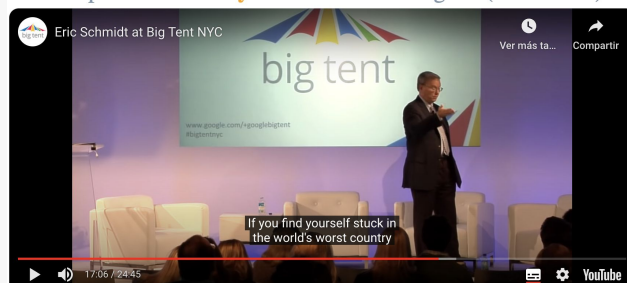**Number of occurrences:** 72

Prosodic characteristics:

- 1 Intonation Phrase that <u>ends after the ADJ</u> "stuck"
- Fixed accentuation pattern

/… **faɪnd** jɔːself **stʌk** /
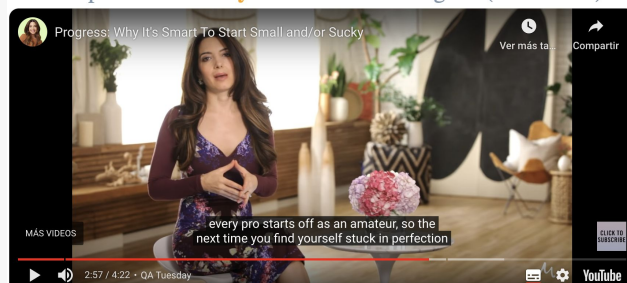
- Coalescence in some cases (phonological process)

/ faɪn**dʒ**ɔːself /

If you **find** **yourself** **stuck** in the world's worst country

every pro starts off as an amateur, so the next time you **find** **yourself** **stuck** in perfection

"FIND YOURSELF ADJ"

✅ Dictionary entry:

- **you did not intend to be in that situation in the first place,**

✅ A quick search in COCA for 'find yourself ADJ' -

- **219 occurrences – 85% adjectives with**

  *a **NEGATIVE** connotation such as alone, afraid, etc.*

- ## (ADJ) + Prepositional phrase: 'in the...'
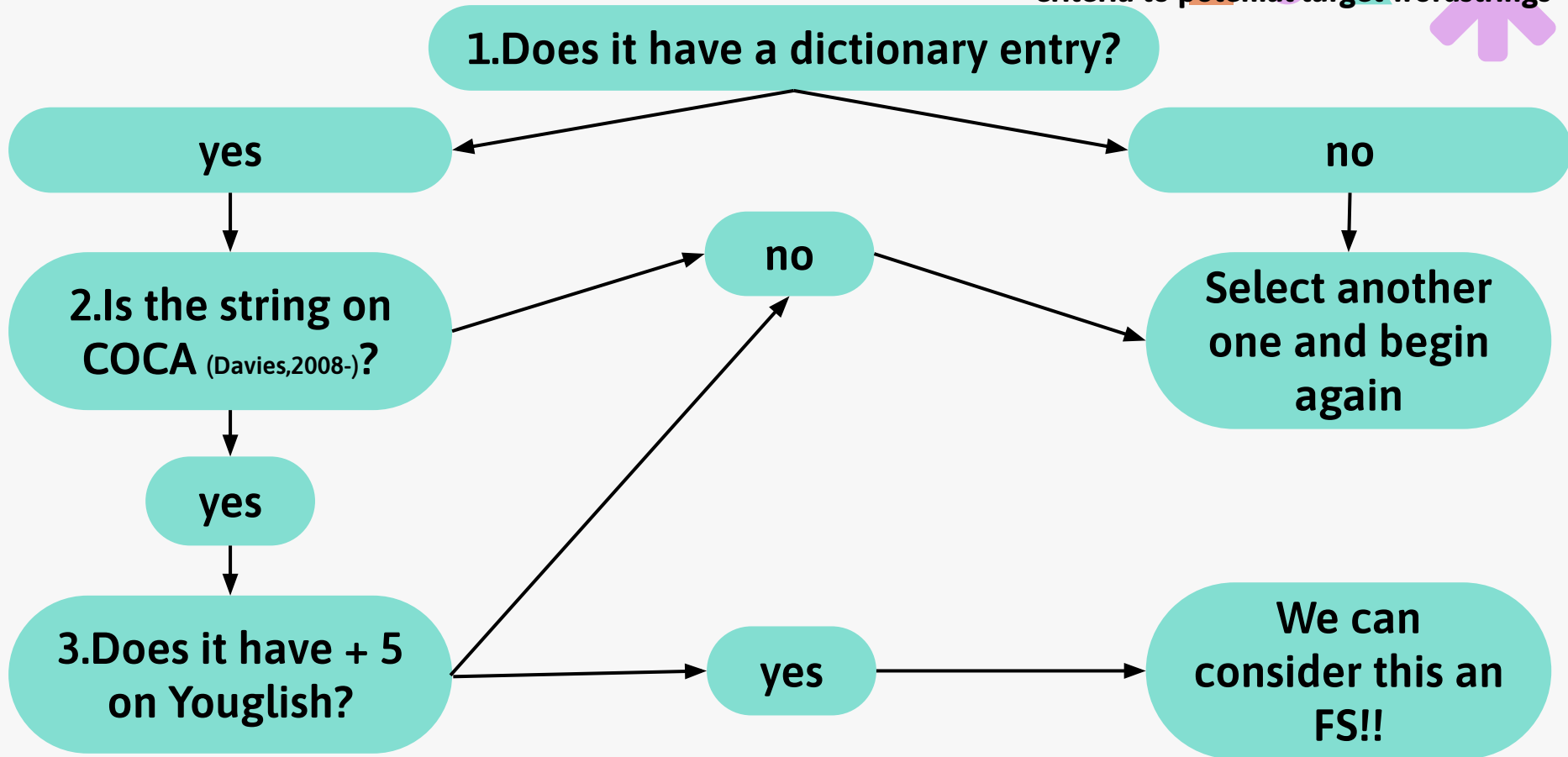
Meaning: IF not "NEGATIVE", at least UNEXPECTED

✅ Searches in YOUglish

TEACHABILITY: **PRODUCTIVE** (combined with both adjectives and Prep. phrases)

FS Decision Map

1.Does it have a dictionary entry?

yes

no

2.Is the string on COCA (Davies,2008-)?

no

Select another one and begin again

yes

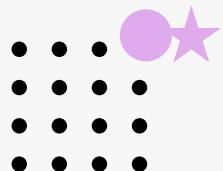3.Does it have + 5 on Youglish?

yes

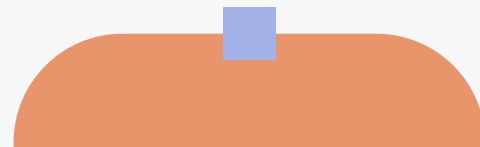We can consider this an FS!!

Is this an FS worth teaching?

★ **Does it appear in my coursebook?**
- ○ **Which FSs? Which areas of formulaic language are missing?**
- ○ **How are they presented? Practised?**

★ **Are there other possible FSs of interest in CB texts?**
- ○ **Unfocused?**
- ○ **productive?(frequency?)**
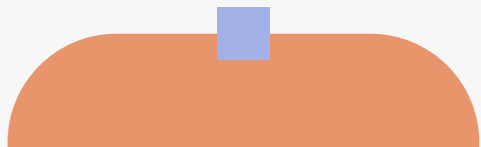- ○ **Suitable to learners' level?**

★ **Do I need to complement the CB's approach?**

Conclusion

When in doubt, to establish whether your selected wordstring is an FS:

- Check the dictionary to see if it appears as a separate entry. This will inform you about its status as a **unit of meaning**. And if the string has a meaning that cannot be derived from the combination of its parts (**non–compositionality**).
- Check its **frequency** on corpora and the web, considering possible variations as regards morphology.
- Check Youglish.com to see if there are more than 5 instances and listen to some to check prosodic features and observe **regularities** in pronunciation (degree of phonological fixedness).
- Check if the wordstring is focused on in your textbooks and/or if they appear in texts you are working with.
- Check if they it's appropriate for sts' proficiency level, learners' age, hours allocated to the course and institutional context.

References

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- You are not alone (2016) by Joe and Jake in Eurovision Song Contest 2016 Stockholm (album) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX7e8DMT-hQ

Thanks!

*Do you have any **questions**?*

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