

Teaching and learning formulaic sequences in a university EFL context

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Contents



**Theoretical background: studies into EFL
formulaic sequence acquisition**

**Current research into FS acquisition at
Comahue University**

Conclusions

A shift away from grammar and single lexical items

- * **Formulaic language and Pragmatics → Formulae (Nattinger and De Carrico 1992)**
- * **Corpus linguistics - computational linguistics and its findings**
- * **The Idiom Principle (semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices) and The Open Choice Principle (Sinclair 1991: 110)**

New perspectives: a wide spectrum of terms

- Chunks or lexical phrases (prefabricated)
- Multiword Units (MWU: Cowie, 1992) (Corpas Pastor 1995)
- Phraseological units / phraseologism (Haensch *et al.* 1982)
- **Formulaic sequences (Wray 2002)**

Research Findings

➤ Phraseological Research

- **Half of** what we communicate is expressed through **fixed expressions**, memorized as **units**.
- Language is loaded with **collocational, colligational and semantic prosody restrictions**.
- **The phrase** is the most basic unit of meaning expression.
- Language users possess **a vast repertoire of** memorised sequences.

(Ellis 1996; Granger & Meunier 2009; Wray 2002)

FS Processing and production in L1 and L2

- NATIVE SPEAKER sensitivity to
 - The **frequency of occurrence** of different constructions
 - The meaning-form **mapping/ priming** in these sequences
- **Advanced NNS'** sensitivity to phrase **frequency** and their internal make-up (binomials)
- In lower levels this effect was lacking (Sivanova-Chanturia *et al.* 2011b)

Research on the effects of FS Instruction - State of the art

Study	Participants	Data collection	Design
Ab Manan et al. (2014a y b)	EAP students	Essay writing	Pre- and post-intervention
Alhassan and Wood (2015)	EAP Canadian students	Summary writing	Pre-and post intervention
Čolović-Marković (2012)	high-intermediate writing students	C-test Essay writing	Pre- and post-intervention
Jones and Haywood (2004)	EAP students	Gap test	post-intervention
Lewis (2009)	intermediate Swedish EFL learners vs. natives	Gap tests compositions	
Peters and Pauwels (2015)	Dutch EFL business students	Cued-output tests Spontaneous use	Pre- and post-intervention

Current research J023 (UNCo): objectives



two explicit, focus-on-form FS instruction experiments (with beginner level and advanced level students)



a corpus study into FS incidental learning in a content-based course



a longitudinal case study of one learner's formulaic competence across his written production in a year



a descriptive analysis of song-derived FS acquisition by senior adults taking a reading comprehension course

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 1 (C1-C2 level)



- * **Participants:** 39 learners taking Lengua Inglesa III (yearly)
- * **Context:** Teacher-training course, Facultad de Lenguas

9 coursebook-derived FSs	EG1 (2015)	EG2 (2017)	CG (2016)
Participants	13	19	7
Treatment	Focus on form (gap-filling tasks, transformations + dictogloss)	Dictogloss (2)	No focused instruction
Data collection	Pre-test 3 delayed posttests 3-5 essays		

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 1 (C1-C2 level)



* Results

EG1	Correct (%)	Variations (%)	No answers (%)
Pt1	76,05	12,83	11,12
Pt2	69,9	21,38	9,41
Pt3	63,63	27,26	9,1

EG2	Correct (%)	Variations (%)	No answers (%)
Pt1	19,0	22,6	56,6
Pt2	42	30,2	27,8
Pt3	--	--	--

CG	Correct (%)	Variations (%)	No answers (%)
Pt1	0,0	57,1	44,4
Pt2	0,0	27,8	72,2
Pt3	5,6	24,1	70,4

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 1 (C1-C2 level)



* Results

- ✓ **Gains** for EG1 (Fonf) and EG2 (Dictogloss) in posttests
- ✓ EG1 gains suffer the effect of time (\neq EG2)
- ✓ EG1 performs much better in posttests than EG2 (instruction-type)
- ✓ **Variations** (attempted FSs) increase in number with **time**; 'No Answers' decrease

Spontaneous Productions

EG1	EG2	CG
29 instances of 7 FSs	50 instances of 9 FSs	0 instances
11/13 participants	15 /19 participants	0/7 participants
3 PAs	5 PAs	3 PAs

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 1 (C1-C2 level)



* Results

- ✓ Initially poor EG2 performance in test completion (PT1 vs. PT2) but many more successful FS **spontaneous uses** than EG1
- ✓ EG2 continue to use TFSs spontaneously despite **time factor**.
- ✓ **Variations for both experimental groups** : morphosyntactic; lexical; blends (Lewis 2009; Wiktorsson 2003)
- ✓ **CG**: no spontaneous production of TFSs. No correct answers
- ✓ Test completion for **CG** was equally unproductive.

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 2 (B1 level)



- * **Participants:** 21 learners at the English Translator- and Teacher-training courses)
- * **TFSs:** 5 formulaic sequences typical of **biography writing**
- * **Procedure:** Pretest + 3-hour Form-focussed Instruction session (focus on form + dictogloss) + data gathering
- * **Data-collection:** practical assignment: guided biography writing (spontaneous production)

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 2 (B1 level)



* Results

Selected FSs	Mastered FSs		Attempted FSs		No attempts	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post-	Pre-	Post-
At the age of	50%	90%	30%	10%	20%	--
In the early (1960)s	38%	80%	42%	20%	20%	--
<i>At that time</i>	5%	10%	10%	10%	85%	80%
In the same year	20%	30%	5%	10%	70%	60%
<i>At the beginning of + NP</i>	43%	5%	10%	--	47%	95%

Focus-on-form FS instruction experiment 2 (B1 level)



* Results

- ✓ There have been some **overall learning gains** (32%- 43%) as an effect of instruction.
- ✓ The effect is clearer for individual FSs:
 - ✓ Improvement observed in **fewer attempts (variations)** in post-treatment task and **more correct answers** (for partly known FSs)
- ✓ ‘No attempts’ dependent on data-collection instrument (guided but spontaneous) → unawareness of 3 FSs
- ✓ Uptake may be dependent on amount of instruction (3 hours).

A study into FS incidental learning in a content-based course



- * **Participants:** 12 teacher-trainees taking Didáctica Especial y Residencia I
- * Baseline data: Google form (PA1) + pre-test:
18 material-derived, technical SFs
- * **Input:** Lesson + Reading material (The Speaking Skill)
 - * “Teaching Speaking” (Brown, 2004)
 - * “Speaking as a Skill” (Bygate, 1993)
- * **Data collection:** 3 written practical assignments (+1 make-up)

A study into FS incidental learning in a content-based course



Results

	Partici pants	TFSs	Correct retrievals	Attempted FSs	Total productions
PA1	5	3/18	2	5 instances of 3 TFSs	7
PA2	8	7/18	9	19 instances of 3TFSs	28
PA3	7	7/18	9	9 instances of 5 TFSs	18
PA4	3	6/18	6	4 instances of 3 TFSs	10
Total	11	9	26	37	63

A study into FS incidental learning in a content-based course



Results

- * Out of the 18 TFSs, **only 9** are either correctly retrieved or attempted (exposure; partially known?)
- * subtle variations → correct FSs?
 - ‘convey the meaning’ → *convey his/her meaning*
- * Some attempts diverge considerably from TFS.
- * **Post-reading tasks** reveal an increase in correct occurrences of TFSs (focussed attention? test-awareness ? committed to memory?)
- * Overall the Idiom Principle prevails.

A longitudinal case study into FS acquisition in essay writing



- * **Participant:** one teacher-trainee during 2015 Lengua Inglesa III
- * **Written production:** essays
- * Pre-test + instruction + all written practical assignments
- * **Data collection:**
 - * 11 practical assignments (PAs) (6.086 words, 209 sentences)
 - * Two interviews (one post-analysis)

A longitudinal case study into FS acquisition in essay writing



Results

- * Spontaneous use of TFSs (advanced Fonf-experiment)
- * Formulaic competence development → strategies
 - * Concatenation of multiple FSs
 - * Making simple FSs more complex
 - * Multiple premodification + Compounding and derivation = complex Noun phrases
 - * Use of one same word in diverse FSs in the same and successive PAs
 - * Same word in FSs used as different parts of speech

A longitudinal case study into FS acquisition in essay writing



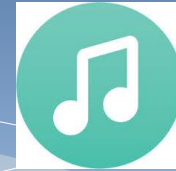
Results

- * 'islands of reliability' (Dechert 1983):
 - * FSs + lexical items &
 - * discourse markers (argumentation)

Beneficial Factors:

- * **A conscious, purposeful and calculated use** (interview) → quasi-nativelike FS quality
- * improvement through **successive attempts**
- * Acute **awareness** of strengths and weaknesses → acts accordingly (interview)

Song-derived FS acquisition by senior adults



- * Data from **9 out of 20-25 participants**
- * Retired beneficiaries of our state health insurance service (PAMI)
UPAMI (Universidad para Adultos Mayores Integrados)
- * A **mixed-ability** class (Tice, 1997)
 - * formal knowledge of L1
 - * background knowledge English as a FL (beginner- lower intermediate)
- * a reading comprehension course at university
- * 2 terms (8 songs)
- * Data collection: recognition and controlled production tasks
(consensus, not formal)

Song-derived FS acquisition by senior adults



Results

- * Some productions resemble original FSs in songs (variations).
- * **Variations** : evidence of learners' **partial retrieval** from memory of TFSs with recourse to **compensation strategies**. Wray (2002): foreign language learners' memories of FSs are subject to loss of detail because they rely on visual or phonological forms they recall.
- * Variations: **lexical items** (same word category and similar meanings to those they cannot remember) + replacement for Function words
- * Correct FSs are part of the choruses.
- * Recognition and comprehension of TFSs

Conclusions for the Research Project

- * Positive effect of instruction on FS acquisition
- * Different types of instruction have distinctive outcomes for c-test completion and spontaneous production.
- * Posttests: where most morpho-syntactic and lexical variations occurred (test-effect?)
- * Most spontaneous FS uses have been felicitous as regards form, meaning and use.
- * Evidence of participants' awareness of the patterns of use of the TFSs in this project
- * Some incidental learning (reading + test awareness)

Conclusions

- * Type and amount of instruction affect retention and retrieval rates for gap tests and essay writing (B1).
- * Success in noticing, learning and retrieving FSs consciously.
- * Age and threshold level (senior learners) are determining factors in FS uptake, recognition and productive retrieval.
- * Variations (attempted FSs) are evidence of
 - * a) learners' awareness of the formulaic nature of the TFSs and
 - * b) the development of learners' formulaic competence.
- * Variations show the compensatory strategies used to make up for “faulty” retrieval (C1-C2, B1, senior learners, case study).

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