

The Acquisition of Formulaic Language: The Type of Formulaic Sequence Makes a Difference

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Formulaic language is an important major component of communicative language. As such, it is necessary that both natives and L2 learners learn large numbers of formulaic sequences in order to be proficient in a language. But what do we know about the acquisition of FL? There have been a number of FL acquisition studies, but they start from a number of different perspectives and focus on a variety of different FL facets, with the result that we have some understanding of how FL is acquired, but there are also large gaps in our knowledge. For example, Nick Ellis' chapter in the recent ARAL 32 special edition on formulaic language discusses the frequency-based aspects of acquisition, but does not address the different types of formulaic language. 'Formulaic language' is an umbrella term for the phenomenon, but there are a number of different categories of FL (e.g. idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations, phrasal expressions, lexical bundles, lexical phrases), each with its own particular characteristics and behavior patterns. It is probably of limited value speaking of the acquisition of FL in general, as any overall conclusion may not generalize across of the different categories. Rather, a finer-grained analysis of the acquisition patterns of the different categories of FL is more likely to provide useful insights. For example, the acquisition of idioms (phrasemes with multiple word forms but a single meaning) is likely to be different from the acquisition of collocations which behave as word partners. Building on the insights from the prior Macis and Garnier presentations, this presentation discusses what research reveals about the acquisition of the various categories of FL, bearing in mind issues such as their transparency, compositionality, polysemy, connotations, collocations, and partner/phraseme nature. It then highlights the key gaps in knowledge and suggests research program to address these.

Summary

Formulaic language is an umbrella term for formulaticity in general, but it contains many subcategories (e.g. idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations, phrasal expressions, etc.), each with its own characteristics and behavior patterns. This presentation discusses how the acquisition of the various categories may differ, and in what ways it is similar.