

Book Review

Understanding formulaic language: A second language acquisition perspective

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The discussion of mechanisms enhancing the acquisition of formulaic language (FL) has been flourishing in recent decades, progressing from describing the concept to revealing its use in various registers: spoken, written, and hybrid. With each domain of linguistics approaching FL in a distinct way, the book *Understanding Formulaic Language: A Second Language Acquisition Perspective* by Anna Siyanova-Chanturia and Ana Pellicer-Sánchez presents a more inclusive view of recent research contributions emerging from different fields, in addition to pointing to critical gaps that need to be addressed in future research. The appeal of the book is that it covers a broad range of topics related to FL, from theoretical perspectives to practical applications. This breadth of coverage is the first effort to foster mutual understanding among linguists and to emphasize its connection with second language acquisition (SLA). The book opens with a description of FL from an SLA perspective, defining the term very broadly as:

Strings of letters, words, sounds, or other elements, contiguous or non-contiguous, of any length, size, frequency, degree of compositionality, literality/figurativeness, abstractness and complexity, not necessarily assumed to be stored, retrieved or processed whole, but 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. (p. 5)

This inclusive scope is specifically rooted in three approaches: cognition/psycholinguistics in Part 1, socio-culture/pragmatics in Part 2, and pedagogy in Part 3. Each part is comprised of 3-6 chapters contributed by leading researchers across the fields. Nearly all the chapters are structured as follows: an introductory section including operational definitions; a general overview of recent studies of formulaicity and its contribution to the acquisition of first language (L1) and/or second language (L2); and, lastly, discussions of research gaps which serve as recommendations for future contributions.

Part 1 opens with Stefanie Wulff's chapter, which provides a concise overview of FL using a usage-based approach. The author examines empirical evidence central to processing and learnability, such as perceptions of form and frequency. She concludes by highlighting the greater role that FL plays in facilitating the acquisition of L1 rather than L2. Given the lack of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in acquiring the latter, the author proposes a more optional path to learning FL for L2 populations. In Chapter 2, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia and Diana Sidtis examine the role that non-compositional idiomatic constructions perform in L1 and L2 development and review a range of psycholinguistic paradigms concerning online processing of FL, such as eye-tracking. The contributors stress the importance of familiarity over frequency in enhancing the learning experience. Like Wulff, Siyanova-Chanturia and Sidtis underscore the fundamental role of FL in facilitating L1 development. Similarly, in Chapter 3, Kathy Conklin and Gareth Carrol explore diverse factors that influence the processing of FL in L1 and their equivalents in L2. To frame this comparison, two types of FL are examined: idioms and collocations; evidence from cross-language studies, including English-Japanese and English-German, is reviewed. The authors conclude that when some features in L1 and L2 are shared, such as form and meaning, the processing of cross-language FL equivalences would likely be effortless. This section closes with Chapter 4 by Phoebe Lin, who examines speech prosody in studying FL. She defines the concept as strings of sounds rather than words. By reviewing studies concerning childhood and post-childhood acquisition of FL, the author stresses the significant function that prosodic characteristics, such as timing and pitch, play in processing FL. The author also makes a strong argument that encountering more L2 oral output maximizes the possibility of acquiring various FL prosodic elements.

Part 2 begins with Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig summarizing how FL is defined and viewed in pragmatics research, where the term “conventional expressions” is frequently employed. With reference to a wide range of language learning mechanisms, such as interaction and language transfer, the author delves into how noticing such expressions in L2 is considerably less challenging than producing them. Drawing on L1 data, Chapter 6 by Nancy Bell and Stephen Skalicky tackles the dynamic association of humor and FL: the former has been long regarded as non-formulaic due to its deviation from expected linguistic patterns but recent evidence reveals that humor is highly formulaic in nature. The authors speculate that integrating humorous formulaic elements into L2 classes increases the possibility of recalling vocabulary and noticing new linguistic forms. This part of the book closes with Chapter 7 by Istvan Kecskes, who underscores the importance of FL from the perspective of intercultural pragmatics, insisting that both individual and societal experiences influence the learnability of FL. The author, therefore, supports the assumption that fluency in intercultural communications entails getting immersed into the target culture and using FL. Given this understanding, he explains why L2 learners have lower accounts of producing already existing FL, emphasizing that their lack of involvement in the target culture results in modifying some formulaic parts to create new prefabricated ones.

Building on the preceding contributions, the third and last part of the book (Part 3) includes six chapters providing implications for better ways of teaching and learning FL. In Chapter 8, Ana Pellicer-Sánchez and Frank Boers focus on three pedagogical approaches specific to formulaicity and vocabulary, namely, intentional learning, incidental learning, and semi-incidental learning. While incidental learning seems to facilitate the acquisition of FL, the discussion showcases the effectiveness of the other two types in guiding L2 learners successfully towards acquisition. Other pedagogical techniques maximizing learners’ uptake are also laid out, including font style and sound patterning. In Chapter 9, Henrik Gyllstad and Norbert Schmitt elaborate on the current application of assessing FL by providing a detailed characterization of seven tests, each developed with a goal of measuring different knowledge areas, such as the *Productive Collocation Test* (Schmitt, Dörnyei, Adolphs, & Durow, 2004) and *DISCO* (Eyckmans, 2009). A comparison between testing single word items and FL reveals the complexity of assessing the latter. With the hope of advancing the design of future FL tests, the contributors offer extensive descriptions and suggestions, covering diverse topics, ranging from establishing more explicit definitions of constructs to integrating technology into assessment. Next, Chapter 10 by Tom Cobb introduces corpora and underlines the usefulness of data-driven approaches for providing meaningful learning opportunities. The main argument is that concordance programs increase the amount of language exposure, making

the learning of various types of FL even more probable. The author suggests that learning can be maximized by addressing the role of internal and external instructional factors, such as learners' motivation, when developing instructional activities. Chapter 11 by Phil Durrant elaborates extensively on the vital role of FL in the context of *English for Academic Purposes*, emphasizing that joining a knowledge community and achieving academic success require both understanding and producing FL patterns. Interestingly, the chapter also outlines many concerns about students using FL, especially concerns that grading could be negatively influenced if such formulas are considered plagiarism and/or lack of intellectual independence. In Chapter 12, Sylviane Granger offers an overview of the study of FL in learner corpora, with a focus on collocations and lexical bundles. As reported in research, limited numbers of FL occur in L2 texts. Almost all instances of these expressions are found among the top frequent FL produced by L1 populations. The author stresses the influence of language transfer, positive and negative, to indicate why the diversity of FL produced increases when L2 learners reach higher proficiency levels. She ends by calling for more replication and mixed-method studies to fill gaps in existing research. The concluding chapter by Alison Wray seeks to explore the central question: "why don't second language learners more proactively target formulaic sequences?" (p. 248). She presents in-depth explanations grounded in all the three, broad, yet distinctive perspectives outlined in the preceding chapters, offering readers extensive opportunities for reflection on the study of FL.

Overall, the key contribution of the book is that it presents the first unifying attempt to challenge the traditional one-way understanding emerging from each field of linguistics. Despite covering a wide range of topics, considerable attention to detail can be noticed throughout the chapters. This manner of presentation enhances the understanding of critical issues concerning the complexity and dynamics of FL, inviting readers to develop their own research interests and conclusions. As attested by Wray (2002), developing a more holistic understanding is particularly important due to the complicated nature of FL. Instead of viewing FL through one lens and mainly in the form of lexical units, this inclusivity is indeed worthwhile for researchers, scholars, and graduate students from various linguistics backgrounds. Given the breadth of topics covered, from theorizing acquisition of FL to discussing its implications for instruction, readers are offered a bigger picture of mechanisms shaping the acquisition of FL.

While the book offers many enriching opportunities to better understand the phenomenon in question, a few limitations can be observed in Part 3. What is noticeable here is that rather than establishing an inclusive overview of topics, a narrower discussion of frameworks and findings seems to be laid out. Given the absence of findings significantly shaping the ways in which FL is being discussed

today, it might be crucial to develop understanding from all pedagogical approaches. Those not familiar with corpora, for instance, could benefit from a more comprehensive discussion of other registers, genres, and technologies. Although framing the discussion around analyses of the top concordance lines seems useful, covering a range of research topics could provide opportunities for reflection helpful for drawing one's own conclusions and enhancing understanding. As demonstrated best by Conrad (2002), corpus research is not limited to presenting concordance outputs; it goes far beyond that to offer rich insights into language uses and registers. If the discussions were extended to include diverse topics, this part could offer readers the foundation required to conceptualize FL more inclusively. Regardless of this limitation, Part 3, among others, seems less abstract as it shifts from conceptual frameworks to grounded practices, making it a valuable resource for readers interested in exploring current pedagogical practices.

On the whole, it is apparent that the book has surely achieved its purpose, with most chapters dedicated to exploring the phenomenon inclusively and informatively. A rich contribution like this is sorely needed with today's growing number of diverse research findings targeting FL. When it comes to readership, the edited collection can be recommended for researchers, specialists in the field of linguistics, and graduate students interested in consolidating their knowledge of FL from a range of linguistic perspectives.

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