



Review of Wood, David. 2015. *Fundamentals of formulaic language: An introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 198 pages. ISBN: 978-0-5672-7898-2.

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The book *Fundamentals of formulaic language: An introduction* by David Wood is considered an insightful, essential and comprehensive account of formulaic language. Formulaic language has been an interesting topic in applied linguistics, corpus linguistics, and language teaching since John Sinclair's works and his contribution to the field of corpus linguistics. The book covers a variety of topics, ranging from theoretical and practical aspects of formulaic language to future directions in formulaic research.

The book consists of ten chapters. The first chapter lays the foundations of the book, providing background on foundational theoretical perspectives and concepts of formulaic language. It describes the theoretical and disciplinary traditions (such as anthropology, sociology, acquisition, and lexicology) which have influenced research into formulaic language over decades. Established terminology referring to formulaic language and its characteristics from various aspects of communication and language studies (e.g. pragmatics, discourse, language acquisition and cognitive processing of language), are presented. Broadly, this chapter deals with the concept of formulaic language from different perspectives, which suggests that formulaic units are not a recent approach, but a significant aspect in any field, particularly language studies and communication. However, the chapter seems to make a short and dense overview of the research history of formulaic language. In fact, the current status of formulaic language research and its roles in language teaching and learning should be mentioned.

After presenting the background of formulaic language studies from different perspectives, Chapter 2 is devoted to the identification of formulaic language in spoken and written texts, introducing some basic principles, ranging from quantitative analysis to psychological judgment. Reviewing related studies on formulaic language, Wood argues that using frequency and statistic measures, such as mutual information (MI) in Schmitt's work

(2010), bears some limitations. This notion is in agreement with Wray (2002; 2008), Martinez and Schmitt (2012), and Wood (2010), who note that it is necessary for a string to be more than just frequent, and needs to have a unitary meaning or function. Wood recommends that additional steps (e.g. psycholinguistic measures, either by experts or native speaker judges) be taken into account to eliminate meaningless combinations of words from functional analyses. Although Wood touches upon a rather interesting and, indeed, tempting issue, it needs to be mentioned that this is not surprising as corpus evidence alone might not provide a strong argument. A complementary use of corpora and a psycholinguistic approach are needed in conducting formulaic research (see e.g. Gilquin & Gries, 2009; Herbst, Faulhaber & Uhrig, 2011).

Chapter 3 outlines concepts, characteristics and functional categories of formulaic sequences. It covers important descriptions and definitions relevant to formulaic sequences, such as idioms, metaphors, lexical phrases, lexical bundles, proverbs and concgrams (given their predicability and combinability). Wood discusses that, due to the different types of data and criteria used to determine formulaic sequences, the classifications and taxonomies of other researchers presented in the literature quite overlap and have changed over time. Some researchers (e.g. Liu, 2012; Wray, 2002), therefore, have created their own sets of descriptions, definitions, and classifications. While Wood directs the reader to the distinctions between definitions of formulaic sequences, this chapter would have benefited from a few examples of practical criteria to distinguish, for example, phrasal verbs, lexical phrases, and collocations, which novice researchers could use in order to conduct research into word strings. Moreover, in light of the nature of the different types of formulaic language presented, it should bring together theory and practice, including hows and whys, besides conducting research on multiword units.

In the chapter that follows, concepts and theories of mental processing of formulaic language are highlighted. Wood touches upon an interesting but rather controversial issue: questioning if formulaic sequences are retrieved and stored as wholes. In the chapter, Wood revisits and reviews research aiming to address this question. Although some evidence for holistic processing comes from studies on idioms and language acquisition, showing that frequency and automatization possibly play a role in the holistic processing, Wood argues that it is still questionable whether the power of input and exposure to language, especially naturally occurring language, affects processing of formulaic language more or less holistically. This argument sheds important light on this issue, which is in line with recent works (i.e. Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015; Siyanova-Chanturia & Martinez, 2015), thus indicating that there are many strong arguments about the holistic storage, processing or retrieval of formulaic language. Therefore, more research focusing on a corpus-based approach and a psycholinguistic approach to the problem that helps to deepen our understanding of the issue is really needed.

A background study into first and second language acquisition of formulaic language is the subject of Chapter 5. The chapter makes use of research findings in order to inform the reader that formulaic sequences might be acquired and retained as wholes by children. They are normally used by native speakers, and used differently by L1 and L2 learners. However, second language speakers who are highly proficient tend to use more formulaic sequences than those with low proficiency. The issues in this chapter are reviewed logically, including first, second, and adult second language acquisition of formulaic language, which facilitates an understanding of the development sequence of acquisition. To this end, Wood argues that formulaic language seems to have an influential role in L1 children's pragmatic and communicative competence, whereas L2 learners mainly use it as a communicative strategy. These contribute to work on language teaching and testing. Overall, since research on formulaic language processing and storage is still at an early stage, more psycholinguistic work is needed in order to draw valid conclusions.

The majority of Chapter 6 is spent on examining the relationship between formulaic language and spoken language by outlining theoretical concerns within speech fluency, phonological characteristics, and speech pragmatics. After presenting a series of frequent sequences in spoken language identified in previous research (e.g. Shin & Nation, 2008; Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010; Martinez & Schmitt, 2012), Wood explores pragmatic-focused research studies, and the effect of speed, pauses and hesitations on speech fluency. The roles of formulaic sequences in the teaching of pragmatic competence are also discussed. Given the characteristics of formulaic language in spoken language, Wood argues that formulaic language appears to be a fundamental aspect of the dynamics and the linguistic content of spoken communication (2015: 97). However, this claim has raised doubts about the role of individual factors. It should be pointed out that individual factors and L1 and L2 teaching and learning contexts are different. Inevitably, in second language fluency, certain temporal variables of speech, such as inputs and learning environments, are highlighted as indicators of fluency. The chapter, therefore, could have benefited from the inclusion of more detailed information on these variables.

The focus of Chapter 7 is the value of formulaic language in written language. The chapter does indeed offer a very general picture of formulaic sequences frequently found in academic writing which was compiled from various types of corpora and disciplines. The chapter also examines the relationship between the use of formulaic sequences and proficiency levels. Even if formulaic language can be said to be a marker of proficient writing in academic contexts, it is worth mentioning that most research focuses on written academic registers rather than on written language in its entirety. More research should be conducted to focus on non-academic registers of written language, delving into psycholinguistic processes. On the downside, the chapter seems to focus on research on lexical bundles in academic contexts, rendering other types of formulaic language research such as proverbs, collocations, and metaphors unclear and questionable. Regarding the implications of formulaic language in

academic writing, Wood points out that “we know very little about its actual role in writing” (2015: 117). Although this is rather tempting, it is interesting to note that some types of teaching methodologies (e.g. reviewing, written review) used for individual words can be effective in teaching formulaic sequences (see Alali & Schmitt, 2012).

Chapter 8 deals with research into lexical bundles and academic discourse. The chapter discusses approaches to the identification criteria of lexical bundles regarding three parameters: frequency, range, and function. Previous research reveals that disciplinary variation greatly affects the use of lexical bundles. In this regard, the chapter should, perhaps, include or introduce some recent works on lexical bundles produced by native and non-native speakers (e.g. Chen & Baker, 2010) and professional discourse (e.g. Jalali, Moini & Arani, 2015) which can be found in the relevant literature, since formulaic sequences and their structures and functions might be distinctive from those of academic texts. The chapter ends posing some pertinent questions about how adult language learners perceive and acquire formulaic language, how we can teach bundles effectively, and how we can be sure that knowledge and awareness of lexical bundles will help students to improve their writing ability. To this end, with regard to the differences in frequency and functions of lexical bundles, approaches to selecting appropriate lexical bundles to be taught need to be mentioned in order to be able to draw effective and valid conclusions.

In Chapter 9 the pedagogical aspects of formulaic sequences in various areas (e.g. language proficiency, ESP, EAP, vocabulary learning and material development) are explored. The chapter discusses the general idea of integrating formulaic sequences into language pedagogy, for example, by using them with sensitivity to the power of input, interaction, form-focused instruction, and syllabus design. Wood goes through principles of the pedagogy of formulaic language and specific types of activities, such as searching corpora for concordances of sequences, or replacing single words with sequences. This feature of the chapter can help readers who need to integrate formulaic language in their plans or to devise activities and lessons with a specific focus on them. The presentation of this part is accessible to a non-specialist reader. However, some computational aspects, the roles of formulaic sequences in language learning, and the means to prepare students and classrooms should be taken into account, especially if technology, formulaic language and the idea of language chunk are introduced into a language classroom for the first time.

The final chapter highlights current and future directions in formulaic language research. Based on the research reviewed in previous chapters, Wood summarizes the importance of formulaic language and its contribution to a range of fields and subfields in language studies, such as Meaning-Text Theory, Usage-based models, lexical priming, and lexical semantics. As a final remark, Wood addresses three concerns that are central to his discussion. First, formulaic language research should move the focus out of the academy and look at professional communication (e.g. service encounters, doctor-patient discourse, etc.). Second, more comparative research focusing on reading and listening to find out the role of

psycholinguistic processes should be conducted. Lastly, future collaborative research and efforts to integrate knowledge of formulaic language with other theories, practices and state-of-the-art methods (e.g. task-based and focus-on-form) are needed. It would be more interesting, however, if this chapter included some new online resources on formulaic language and the use of corpora in language classroom, which are an on-going debate in terms of their representativeness and authenticity, and made reference to how they should be incorporated into language classroom, and to how native and non-native speakers are sensitive to formulaic language during online language lessons.

The book and its content are worthy of attention by language teachers and new researchers, particularly in the field of corpus linguistics and language teaching. Each chapter follows the same format, starting with a brief introduction which leads to the core of a particular topic that is further discussed. The number of studies reviewed focusing on formulaic language and presented in each chapter can broaden ideas of and widen perspectives on formulaic language and its development and contribution to the field. Each chapter ends with a brief summary and a series of interesting questions as points for readers to reflect on. Potential readers can find them helpful to understand the notion of formulaic language, theoretical concerns and various arguments related to it. Although some detailed and up-to-date information on formulaic language (e.g. creating academic word lists, technologies, and online resources and its applications) is not revisited, the book is a helpful resource for advanced learners and graduate students. It is also easily accessible to a non-specialist reader. I firmly believe that the book can be of help to readers who possess this particular interest, stimulating further research on this topic in SLA, teaching, applied linguistics, and corpus linguistics.

Given the wide range of topics covered, the book will prove to be a very useful resource for researchers, practitioners of language acquisition, and classroom teachers to improve students' language proficiency and maximize learning gains, or at least, to familiarise themselves with formulaic sequences when integrating formulaic sequences into classroom practice. For researchers, this book may offer new insights into current research and debates on formulaic language and its practical applications. For language teachers, the importance, characteristics and functions of formulaic language, and the benefits of its acquisition, should be taken into consideration and perhaps eventually adapted to classroom pedagogy, lessons and activities to maximize the effectiveness of various pedagogical methods and teaching delivery. Although this book seems to be limited by specific approaches to identifying formulaicity and activities informed by current studies on formulaic language, it can accomplish its objective as an introduction to the topic. Also, the content in this book is beneficial to those who wish to continue exploring this subject-matter and the ideas of "important building blocks in discourse" (Biber & Barbieri, 2007: 270) that Wood raises throughout the book.

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