There Is So Much Formulaic Language: How Can It Be Taught?

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The ubiquity of formulaic language in English has been cited as one of the central reasons for developing EFL and ESL learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences through explicit instruction (Meunier, 2012). However, the large quantity of formulaic language available to choose from may cause language teachers to feel overwhelmed when facing the tasks of finding sources of formulaic language, deciding which formulaic sequences to teach, and how best to teach them. This presentation reviews the relevant research (particularly the new research presented in this colloquium) to identify techniques and strategies for selecting and teaching formulaic sequences, thereby providing practitioners with practical guidance for incorporating the instruction of formulaic language into the L2 language classroom. This presentation begins with a survey of the corpus consultation resources available to teachers and provides a brief examination of their utilization and features. Next, results from research focusing on the acquisition of formulaic sequences are considered, and the selection and grouping methods that have been shown to increase the chance of sequence acquisition are presented. The following grouping approaches are amongst those considered: sequences containing semantically-related words (Boers & Lindstrom, 2012); alliterative and assonant sequences (Boers & Lindstrom, 2005; Boers, Lindstromberg, & Eyckmans, 2012; Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008), and formulaic sequences grouped by topic (Zyzik, 2011). The presentation goes on to describe the effects that the following pedagogical interventions have been shown to have on the acquisition of formulaic language: the use of imagery (Carpenter & Olson, 2012; Szczepaniak & Lew, 2011), rote memorization (Ding, 2007), and frequently occurring textbook exercises (Boers, Demecheleer, Coxhead, & Webb, in press). The presentation concludes with a discussion of empirical studies that should be undertaken in the future to advance what is known about the uniqueness of teaching formulaic language and to improve the pedagogical treatment of formulaic sequences.

Summary

This presentation reviews research on the acquisition of formulaic language to identify effective methods for the selection and teaching of different types of formulaic sequences. This will provide practitioners with practical guidance for incorporating formulaic language instruction into a curriculum. Unanswered questions about formulaic language and pedagogy are also identified.