

The Role of Formulaic Sequences in Assisting Language Development and Its Importance in Iranian EFL Textbooks

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Abstract: *This article makes an attempt to shed light on the role of formulaic sequences in second language acquisition and second language classroom. The most useful impact of formulaic sequences (hereafter FSs) is to help learners to achieve native-like proficiency, what is rarely gained through second language acquisition. In addition to native-like, FSs foster learners' accuracy and fluency. One of the aims of second language acquisition is to increase learners' communicative competence and one of the components of the communicative competence is strategic competence to which FSs belong. So material providers should include these expressions in textbooks and teachers should consider them as a part of their lesson plan in order to equip learners with these expressions so that learners can apply them as communication strategies in specific contexts. After surveying the textbooks of high school based on Swan's classification, we came to a conclusion that only few expressions of two categories of this framework, fixed phrases and collocation, could be found very rarely, in other words, formulaic sequences do not get any attention and importance in Iranian EFL textbooks.*

Keywords: *Formulaic Sequences; Native-Like Proficiency; Second Language Acquisition*

Introduction

It is believed by some researchers that linguistic system that every learner needs to learn is made of two subsystems: a rule-based system, generative rules, and a memory-based system, memorized chunks. The former system leads to creative system and the latter one is functioning in processing speed. These two systems cannot work separately (Skehan, 1998, cited in Yu, 2013). When audio lingual method received widespread criticism because this method lacked creativity, FSs were rejected too but cognitive approaches verify the use of FSs because learners can deduce second language grammar from FSs. They have gained their reputation when focus on form has become a heatedly debated issue. Ellis (1984) puts emphasis on the role of FSs as an important part of inter-language of learners in an instructed setting (cited in Taylor, 1999, P. 6). Wray defines (1999) "multiple word phraseological units" (Schmitt, 2010, cited in Davies, 2014); "multi-word chunks" (Arnon et al., 2014); "formulaic expression" (Kecskes, 1999 & Zaifar, 2015); "formulaic speech" (Taylor, 1999); "formulaic language" (Swan 2006) or "discourse management" (Dornyei & Kormos, cited in Ellis, N., 2002) as "a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning

elements, which is, or appears to be ,prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar" (cited in McCauley et al. ,2015).Some researchers claim if learners learn and apply FSs they can reach native-like selection and fluency. While using FSs in conversation, speakers need to pay attention to other aspects of the conversation. "Thus in using FS such as "whaddaya wanna do for your birthday" language users have used "whaddaya wanna" many times so they do not worry about its formation and can pay attention to other part of the utterance or "for your birthday (Taylor, 1999, p.7). FSs give speaker time to pay attention to other tasks while speaking including creating special lexical items, thinking the subsequent part of discourse, producing new pieces of syntax (Wood, 2002).So FSs save processing time in other words these chunks decrease the cognitive onus and effort and let brain be free for other tasks (Davies,2014, p.3). Based on this fact that FSs can facilitate learning and comprehension language teachers should include FSs in a lesson plan in order to provide learners with some opportunities to guess and grasp the grammar of the pattern they encounter in the class in other words, FS can have its role in second language classroom. If teachers are going to focus on native like communicative competence they should train learners in a way that they became sensitive to use the proper expressions of language in the proper socially accepted setting. As Schmitt and Carter (2010) claim they can be used as "pedagogical tool rather than as a cognitive phenomenon"(cited in Davies, 2014). Swan (2006) classifies FSs that capture researchers' attention because of their importance in SLA and their native like proficiency into four categories: 1. "fixed phrase: (idiomatic or not) such as *out of work, this morning, break even*"

2."collocations: the preference that some words have for particular partners such as *blazing row* more natural than *burning row*."

3. "situationally bound preferred formulae such as "*sorry to keep you waiting*" more natural than "*sorry I made you wait*."

4. "frames such as "*if I were you; perhaps we could; I thought I'd*". Learning vocabulary and grammar does not guarantee that learners prefer "*blazing row*" to "*burning row*". One of the best psycholinguistic models of speech is by Levelt (1989). He considers speaking skill as process- and product- oriented that contains four stages; *conceptualization*: speaker selects content and idea; *formulation*: speaker strings lexico-grammatical structures together; *articulation*: speaker should be able to produce and articulate their thoughts and *mental lexicon* (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 232).Mental lexicon is the place where you can find hundreds of thousands of chunks or formulaic expressions that a speaker uses them without trying to make

up the phrases based on language rules (Gettys et al. 2013). Pawley and Syder (1983) define FSs as "memorized sentences and phrases which are building blocks of fluent speech and models for creation of many new sequences"(cited in Gettys et al. 2013).The speaker monitors only the first stage, conceptualization, in order to control what s/he wants to say and other three stages are automatic in other words, FSs aid the speaker to be more fluent and faster. We are going to investigate whether these chunks have been included in Iranian EFL textbooks of high school and also to estimate the proportion of these chunks. The categories of the above framework which are absent will be mentioned too.

How Can FSs Play a Crucial Function in Adult Language Use?

FS is an important issue in cognitive linguistics that studies relationships between language and cognition. Cognitive linguistics like usage- based linguistics believes that language is learnt and emerged through using of multiword sequences and language is not just a collection of rules, universal grammar linguistics insists on language as a collection of rules . Learner should experience with language or usage events directly. These linguists rely on associative learning. Connectionism is another branch of cognitive linguistics that tries to model the cognitive language processing of the human brain in a computational perspective. Connectionism claims learner learns language through frequency of input and examples found in language input by using computer architectures. Connectionists assert that two important sources, that is, computational model of acquisition and FSs or concrete multiword units cause to form learners' language processing (McCauley et al. 2015). It is believed that such chunks can occupy one –third to one half of our everyday conversation. Analyzing corpora can determine the ratio of these expressions (Howarth, 1998; Erman & Warren2000; Foster, 2001, cited in Conklin et al., 2008).

The Function of FSs in Learning a Language

Children learning their first language and adults learning a second language tend to use larger chunks when learning a language. Peters (1983) revealed the role of gestalt processes in language learning. It means that learning occurs in terms of whole concepts or experience, rather than through individual words. Usage-based approaches also emphasize this point that children learn the grammar of their first language

by relying on generalizing from stored utterances and grasping grammatical patterns that lie between words (cited in Arnon et al., 2014). The above sentences mean children use larger chunks to detect linguistic units and relations between them, this fact testifies the importance of FSs in L2 classroom and helps the SLA

researchers to understand how learners acquire second language. Swan reports children acquire their first language unconsciously through hearing and observing the rules between the words of these chunks. *It's time to bed. It's time for bath. It's time for lunch.* By the same token, second language learners should be able to figure these rules out by exposure to these memorized chunks (Swan, 2006). Bannard and Matthews (2008) did some research to reveal that children tend to learn more frequent chunks than less ones and that they process them differently (cited in McCauley et al., 2015, p. 9). Fillmore (1976) states that a lot of expressions of everyday language are FSs than new and creative utterances. A remarkable part of our conversation is restricted to short utterances that we do not mean what we say. For example, A: where are you going? B: just around, person A does not really ask and care where person B is going and if person B is going to do something important s/he says only "just around". Theoretical and applied linguistics, pragmatics and SLA lay stress on these FSs a lot (cited in Kecskes, 1999). Rubin (2000) describes the characteristics of a language learner who distinguishes which strategy is suitable for particular tasks and contexts. One of them is the time when the learners apply FSs and chunks of language in order to handle beyond their ability and competence. Although some good learners may have some limitations in the domain of vocabulary they can continue the conversation because they use the right strategy in that moment including prefabricated patterns or FSs. It shows one of the communicative competence, that is, compensatory or strategic competence (cited in Ziafar, 2015). Wood, Xingping and Keisheng (2007) found out speaking skill is facilitated through the use of FSs and Erman (2009), Chen and Baker (2010) found out writing skill is improved through the use of FSs (cited in Ziafar, 2015). Dechert (1983) considers these chunks as "islands of reliability" that can help other cognitive areas to create new strings of language (cited in Davies, 2014). Wray (2002) points to the functions of FSs that they cause learners to express their ideas economically in other words, "they buy us time" and also they are regarded as basis for future creative speech (cited in Kim, 2009).

Recent Studies on FSs

Wood (2010) announces that there is a straight relation between using FSs and the development of fluency. In an experiment 11 students were studied when they watched movies that contained formulaic language. The students watched and retold the stories. After transcribing and analyzing the data, Wood found a relation between the use of formulaic language and development of fluency (cited in Davies, 2014). Ellis, N. (2002) expresses the importance of FSs and believes that learning FSs is more essential than learning

grammar because learners can get and understand the pragmatic or interpretation meaning by learning FSs that results in raising their communicative capacity (Cutierrez-Colon et al. , 2010). Cutierrez-Colon et al. (2010) reveal that there was a straight correlation between written forms of FSs and level of language proficiency through a study done on 138 students. However the use of FSs differs based on their level of proficiency. Ellis (2002) asserts that learning a language does not mean acquiring grammar in the form of some abstract rules but learners need to own a huge collection of previously experienced utterances. There are some studies that show FSs and novel language are processed by different mental and neurological structures (lancker-Sidtis et al., 2004). Guz (2014) tries to show that using FSs by native speakers of Polish has effect on the speed of speech and also the speakers tend to use longer stretches of speech between pauses that contributes to fluency of native speakers. The criteria of speakers' output including "speed rate, articulation rate, mean length of runs, mean length of pauses, and phonation time ration were measured." Wood (2007) analyzes the data recorded on tape of the Chinese speakers who leave their country and live in the countries whose people speak English to reinforce their fluency in English while using FSs. Some documents show that they can improve their fluency during a six month period and he notices applying of these FSs plays a role in this improvement. Natsumi (2014) in a review study draws a conclusion that non-native speakers do not tend to use these chunks and L2 learners do not improve these chunks while communicating. But when the learners commence mastering in this domain they will get fluent use of language, however the learners progress very slowly (Howarth, 1998; Kupier, Columbus & Schmitt, 2009; Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005, cited in Natsumi, 2014). Natsumi (2014) asserts that learners should promote the acquisition of these chunks although they progress slowly, hence it reveals that this area needs multiple encounters with these target items. Keshavarz and Salimi (2007) report that there is a relation between learners' competence of using collocation (a subcategory of FSs) and their general proficiency. Laufer and Waldman (2011) announce that advanced L2 learners who are more familiar with these chunks can benefit from them more and they manifest a competence of this knowledge that is closer to that of native speakers (cited in Natsumi, 2014). Since FSs are rarely considered as a part of pedagogical materials in any principled manner by the same token they are rarely assessed as learners' vocabulary competence so little research has been done on how to teach them effectively (Alali et al., 2012). Alali in her study comes a conclusion that the same kinds of teaching methodologies that are used to teach individual words can be applied to teach FSs. She claims that repetition and a lot of exposure to these chunks are important tools and can improve FSs. As Natsumi (2014) has the same opinion that learners should have a lot of exposure to FSs through

their textbooks and also four main skills. Based on Natsumi even pedagogical treatment such as "awareness raising, and input flood help learners meet that challenge." Some researchers have found some clear evidence that shows adults learning a second language can benefit from FSs in a greater variability than children. Schmidt (1983) in a case study on a Japanese adult uncovered that this learner used FSs in different ways as a communication strategy when the learner faced inadequate skills in other aspects of language (cited in Wood, 2002).

Discussion and Results

FSs are so crucial for acquisition of a language that they may be considered as key building blocks of the emerging language system (McCauley et al., 2015). Interlanguage theory lays emphasis on the dynamic property of language changes that makes it different from L1 and L2 as a unique system. It has a developmental way towards target language. Ellis (1984) considers three stages for this developmental way "silent period, formulaic speech, and structured and semantic simplification." After silent period that learners start to build listening competence formulaic speech emerges that can be found in L1 and L2. They are learnt as memorized chunks such as "I don't know" or as unanalyzed chunks such as "can I have a" (cited in Ipek, 2009). As Kim (2009) explains that there are three types of learners' productions "imitation, formulaic and creative speech". Because of the importance and advantages of FSs that were mentioned we surveyed the Iranian EFL textbooks of high school in order to investigate if material providers have paid attention to these chunks. Regrettably, the word lists of the books of grades 1, 2, and 3 respectively contain 8%, 5%, and 7% of fixed phrases and collocations. It should be mentioned that the book of the grade one involves some frames too. The word list of the grade four that has 404 words contains 4 fixed phrases, it means less than 1% of the words is (are) fixed phrases. So the results clearly show that the lists of word of our high school textbooks entail only a little percent of phrases and collocations. These books are devoid of other categories of FSs that Swan names based on his framework such as situationally bound preferred formulae, frames and even proverbs. Nowadays discourse has a critical function in learning a language and formulaic language is an essential component of this discourse in other words, a remarkable part of native speakers' everyday conversation and discourse is formulaic language and as a result it can help learners to gain more native like competence. As mentioned earlier, FSs have a lot of roles. One of the most important roles is their pragmatic value when used in communicative needs "I'm sorry to hear about" expresses sympathy or "I'm happy to show " indicates a kind of obeying of

a rule or an order (Conklin et al.,2008). They are double- edged because speakers and hearers can benefit from them. They have a main role in saving language processing effects. They are called time buyers such as fillers, which are considered as an aspect of strategic competence and interjections, which are often regarded as one of the parts of speech that help speakers to focus on subject matter so that the message is constructed (Bygate, 1988, cited in Wei et al., 2011). FSs can maintain social interaction when speakers have some insufficient linguistic competence and enable them to proceed and enter into communication which is beyond their linguistic level. These chunks are like a short-cut and a means which make the social interaction possible and successful (Wie et al. 2011). Pawley and Syder (1988) argue that FSs facilitate language production that shows itself in two aspects: native like selection and native like fluency. The former means how speaker selects freely what is natural in order to convey their ideas based on appropriate context and the latter means how speaker can speak and produce a fluent discourse without difficulties. Fluency is" the ability to produce written and / or spoken language with ease, to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar and to communicate ideas effectively"(Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985, cited in Wei et al., 2011).Learners are dependent on these chunks at early stages of learning a language first or second (Wray, 2002). Jackendoff (1995) claims that the value of number of formulaic language may be more than that of individual words, although he has not done any empirical research (Alai et al., 2012). Another crucial merit of these chunks is that they are authentic, hence learners are exposed to authentic materials and authentic native like input. We know these authentic materials stick in long-term memory and can be used in real contexts and communication spontaneously (Wood,2002).As said before , because of saving time property they cause learners to react more quickly that leads to learners' confidence. Learners' self-confidence results in powerful reinforcement mechanism which has a lot of impetuously obvious advantages (Taylor, 1999) but Alali et al. (2012) mention that they take a lot of time and need plenty of input and repetition.

Conclusion

Children and adults apply FSs as units of acquisition and teachers should know how to include them into lesson plan and pedagogical materials in order to equip learners with these expressions to apply them as communication strategy in specific settings. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) select books that half of them cover applications of knowledge of FSs and Lewis (1997) and Willis(1990) provide syllabuses that involve different types of FSs (cited in Wood, 2002). Besides to oral skills, FSs can be applied in writing skill too.

Wood (2002) believes in dictogloss technique when the teacher reads a short passage at normal speech twice and the learners listen to it, then the learners are asked to reconstruct content words and whatever they can remember. They can compare and contrast their writing with original texts that can entail a lot of these chunks. Bygate (1988) suggests small-group activities that members of the groups have to use FSs while acting the tasks (cited in Wood, 2002). It is believed that FSs can be taught implicitly and explicitly. It is very necessary for material providers to include these expressions in our textbooks because our students have few or no opportunities to meet these expressions outside the classroom. To compensate this shortage, the teachers can encourage extensive reading and listening, so the students can read or listen to authentic materials such as stories, magazines, newspapers, news, and films. I hope this study could have a positive effect on the future English teaching method and learning strategy. Our textbooks should consist of these chunks because they can facilitate second language teaching and learning.

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