Identifying and analysing formulaic sequences in L2 production

David O'Reilly
PhD Student
University of York

Formulaic sequences are a multifaceted phenomenon which has been researched using a variety of taxonomies (e.g. Howarth, 1998; Hsu, 2014). Clearly of use to foreign language learners, teachers and EFL/ESL teachers, lists of formulaic sequences such as Martinez and Schmitt's (2012) Phrasal Expressions List support existing lists of individual word forms and other resources available to the language learner.

Currently, a large body of SLA research on developmental processes and the acquisition of certain forms exists. With regard to formulaic sequences, however, there is argued to be a lack of research into how L2 learners make progress towards target like use of formulaic language, for instance along dimensions such as frequency, accuracy and variation (Qi & Ding, 2011). Moreover, the identification and analysis of non-target like formulaic sequences in such research can be problematic for a number of reasons including the difficulty of classifying data according to lexico-grammatical error types and (in certain cases) a lack of native speaker consensus on the 'target form'.

The present paper reports on and discusses issues such as these, encountered during the identification and analysis of formulaic sequences in L2 production. The data were obtained from a metaphoric competence test battery developed and administered in the written mode to 112 non-native speakers of English (L1 Chinese) and 30 English native speakers during a PhD study. In particular, the discussion focuses on data from two sections of the test, the theoretical basis of which takes root in Littlemore and Low (2006) and Low (1988). In the first, as a measure of ability to use metaphor to signify a change a topic, participants were required to supply an appropriate "phrase/expression" (e.g. *plenty more fish in the sea*) to finish a short dialogue. In the second, participants' ability to complete extended idioms was measured (e.g. *She fell so head over heels in love that _____*).

As part of an ongoing PhD (to be submitted 2016), I very much welcome comments and questions. Where possible, I offer and invite discussion on my own suggestions about methodological decisions and approach.

References
Howarth, P. (1998). Phraseology and second language proficiency. *Applied Linguistics 19*(1) (1998), pp. 24–44

Hsu, W. (2014). The most frequent opaque formulaic sequences in English-medium college textbooks. *System 47* (146-161)

Littlemore, J. & Low, G. (2006). *Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning*. UK: Palgrave.

Low, G. (1988). On teaching metaphor. *Applied Linguistics 9*(2), 125-147.

Martinez, R., & Schmitt, N. (2012). A phrasal expressions list. *Applied Linguistics 33*(3), 229-320

Qi Y., & Ding Y. (2011). Use of formulaic sequences in monologues of Chinese EFL learners. *System 39*, 164-174.