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ALAPSZAKOS

SZAKDOLGOZAT

Dremmel Noémi

Anglisztika alapszak

Angol szakirány

2021

ALAPSZAKOS

SZAKDOLGOZAT

Az állandósult szókapcsolatok előnyei az angol nyelvtanulásban

Benefits of lexical phrases in English language learning

Témavezető:

Dr. Dóczi Brigitta

Egyetemi adjunktus

Készítette:

Dremmel Noémi

Anglisztika alapszak

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A HKR 346. § ad 76. § (4) c) pontja értelmében:

„… A szakdolgozathoz csatolni kell egy nyilatkozatot arról, hogy a munka a hallgató saját szellemi terméke…"

NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott **Dremmel Noémi s.k.** ezennel kijelentem és aláírásommal megerősítem, hogy az ELTE BTK **anglisztika**... alapképzés/alapszak **angol** .... szakirányán írt jelen szakdolgozatom saját szellemi termékem, melyet korábban más szakon még nem nyújtottam be szakdolgozatként/záródolgozatként és amelybe mások munkáját (könyv, tanulmány, kézirat, internetes forrás, személyes közlés stb.) idézőjel és pontos hivatkozások nélkül nem építettem be.

Budapest, 2021. 04. 15.

Dremmel Noémi s.k.

aláírás

Abstract

The role of formulaic language in second-language acquisition (SLA) has received considerable attention in applied linguistics research over the past three decades. At present, numerous studies have shown that the knowledge of lexical phrases can improve the overall communicative skills of second language (L2) students. Awareness and consistent use of lexical phrases aid students in several ways during the process of language production and comprehension as well. One pedagogical approach that utilises these benefits is the Lexical Approach (LA). By synthesising existing literature, the present thesis aims to review the concept of formulaic language and list its most considerable benefits for English learners, while also addressing potential issues and limitations.

Keywords: formulaic language, Lexical Approach, lexical phrases, lexical bundles

Contents

1 Introduction

Over the course of the past 30 years, academic discourse in the applied linguistics field has become increasingly focused on multiword items (MWIs) – frequently recurrent word sequences – that are more recently called formulaic language, the units of which are called formulaic sequences (Wood, 2020). The interchangeable terms multiword units and formulaic language/sequences are used "to refer to the different types of multiword combinations that have the tendency to occur together in written and spoken discourse" (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2020, p. 169). Henceforth, the aforementioned terms as well as the terms lexical phrases/chunks will be used interchangeably in the rest of the paper.

On average, 55% of English discourse is formulaic (Erman & Warren, 2000). Consequently, the role of formulaic language in discourse is essential (Bieber & Barbieri, 2007). The frequency of formulaic sequences holds great practical value, rendering them the most useful elements of language (Racine, 2018). An understanding of lexical phrases is crucial to becoming pragmatically adept, due to their functionality (Schmitt, 2000); therefore, the incorporation of lexical phrases into the syllabus is imperative (Racine, 2018).

For a while, MWIs and their role in language acquisition had been ignored in the classroom (Wray, 1999). Fortunately, described as "an ideal unit for language teaching" (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 32) the effect of incorporating lexical chunks into language learning has been extensively examined in the past three decades. It is now well established from a variety of studies that learning and utilising formulaic sequences has a positive effect on students. Consequently, English teachers and learners must be aware of the existence of formulaic language, and the recognition and use of lexical phrases should be encouraged for L2 learners.

This paper concentrates on the multifarious role of lexical phrases in improving the language competence of English learners. First, a synthesis is provided on the definition and classification of formulaic language, then the theoretical base for the paper is introduced. The thesis then proceeds to list the various benefits lexical phrases offer to L2 learners. Finally, pedagogical implications and possible issues are discussed.

2 Defining and categorising formulaic language

Each year, a considerable number of publications are presented on formulaic sequences. The topic has been investigated by a variety of individual linguistic fields, thereby creating significant heterogeneity in terminology (Wray, 1999). Consequently, the taxonomy of lexical phrases is also quite varied across literature in phraseology. This chapter aims to collect and present different approaches, definitions, and categorisations found in previous literature.

2.1 Key issues

One obstacle in researching formulaic language is the relative lack of structure and consistency that typifies literature on the subject. To date, there is no concordant definition of multiword units (Wolter, 2020). Apart from students and educators, researchers also encounter difficulties in the process of researching and understanding MWIs due to inconsistent terminology in the topic. The core of this issue can be found in the research of Mohammadi and Enayati (2018), who point out that lexical phrases "are difficult to define in simple, universally applicable terms" (p. 181). One of the most considerable bodies of research investigating formulaic language can be attributed to Allison Wray (see 1999, 2000, 2002, etc.). She observes that formulaic sequences "have been subject to independent labelling" (Wray,

2000, p. 464), and lists well over 40 different phrases used to express aspects of formulaicity that demonstrate notable variation. The next section gathers prevalent definitions of formulaic sequences, then showcases various classifications.

2.2 Definitions of formulaic language

One of the most extensive and comprehensive definitions for the formulaic sequence is the following:

> 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. (Wray, 2000, p. 465)

In a later publication, the term formulaic is described as "predictable in form and idiomatic, and seems to be stored in fixed, or semi-fixed chunks" (Wray, 2002, p. i). In other words, formulaic language consists of "words and word strings which appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition" (Wray, 2002, p. 4).

Another definition, focusing on the functionality of lexical chunks, describes them as "longer sequences of words" that "pattern together" and are "institutionalized as the most efficient and most familiar linguistic means to carry out language functions" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 400). One concise and simple definition claims that lexical phrases are "the most frequently recurring sequences of words" (Biber & Barbieri, 2007, p. 264). Pang's (2010) definition also focuses on the aspect of frequency, specifying them as a "sequence of three to four words that recur frequently in corpus-based discourse, both written and verbal" (p. 1).

2.3 Cross-section of the taxonomies of formulaic language

Several taxonomies of formulaic language have been developed, of which this section presents an overview in chronological order. An earlier classification of lexical phrases consisting of six classes was suggested by Becker (1975):

Table 1

Classification of lexical phrases

Class	Definition	Function	Examples
Polywords	multi-word phrases admitting no variability, interchangeable with single words or concepts	same as single words	(the) oldest profession; to blow up; for good
Phrasal constraints	units consisting of a small number of words, some of which constrain the variability of others	often specify how a particular expressive function is to be applied to particular semantic material	by sheer coincidence
Deictic locutions	phrases with low variability	serving as clauses or whole utterances whose purpose is to direct the course of conversation	for that matter… that's all …
Sentence builders	phrases up to sentence length, often containing slots for "parameters" or "arguments"	provide the skeleton for expression of an entire idea	(person A) gave (person B) a (long) song and dance about (a topic)
Situational utterances	complete sentences with little variability	appropriate thing to say in certain circumstances	how can I ever repay you
Verbatim texts	texts of any length memorized verbatim	substance for quotation, allusion or variation	better late than never; How ya gonna keep `em down on the farm?

Note. Becker's taxonomy of lexical phrases, adapted from Becker (1975, p. 61)

As all grammatical categorisations, the categorisation of lexical items also poses difficulties, especially when it concerns clear boundaries (Lewis, 2002). Lewis (1997) identifies four types of lexical items:

- Words and Polywords

- Collocations

- Institutionalised utterances

- Sentence frames and heads (pp. 255-256)

However, the categories can overlap, and on occasion – particularly in an educational context – an alteration of classification might be needed (Lewis, 1997). In the taxonomy of Lewis (1997), words are described as independent units that have been acknowledged in L1 and L2 teaching for the longest time. Polywords are basic multiword expressions that are idiomatic to an extent. Collocations are connected to frequency, and thus are strongly connected to corpus linguistics. Institutionalised utterances are more commonly found in the spoken register. Lewis considers sentence frames and heads equal to institutionalised utterances, but in writing. In addition, the four categories can also be separated into two groups: words and polywords carry referential, meanwhile institutionalised utterances and sentence frames and heads carry pragmatic meaning. In 2002, his list was modified to only include the main groups of polywords, collocations, and institutionalised expressions, in which sentence frames are a subcategory.

To summarise the large number of categories published in various research, a list of the most common classifications based on previous literature was compiled by Racine (2018):

- individual words

- polywords:

  - compounds (e.g., hot dog, blue-collar)

- – phrasal verbs (e.g., come across, run out of)

- – binomials and trinomials (e.g., apples and oranges; this, that, and the other)

- idioms (e.g., on cloud nine; get someone's goat)

- similes (e.g., like a fish out of water; as fast as lightning)

- proverbs (e.g., ignorance is bliss; honesty is the best policy)

- sentence frames (e.g., not only X, but also Y; the _____er, the _____er)

- institutionalized utterances (e.g., Thank you for having me; Give me a break; There's a call for you.)

- collocations (e.g., negotiate an agreement, a substantial number, splitting headache, by far, for instance, you know) (p. 2).

Individual words are mentioned in some of the studies (e.g., Lewis 1997, 2002), but are not presented as relevant to formulaicity. However, Racine's list demonstrates that single-word items (mainly fillers, e.g., eh, like, well) can also be considered formulaic, this largely depends on the author's approach. Nonetheless, the target in the research of formulaic language are not single-word items but multiword items, which are the main focus of this thesis as well.

2.4 Current state of research

Since linguists first started examining formulaic language, not only the relevant phrases and classifications have evolved, but also the core concept of the whole topic. While in the beginning, the formulaic sequences analysed were virtually all idiomatic to an extent and examined based chiefly on their property of idiomaticity, the development of corpus analysis brought forth a different, frequency-based approach. By the end of the 20th century, new technologies capable of collecting and assessing corpora were developed and opened up new horizons for linguists. The novel methods for analysing corpora showed that there are frequently

recurring sequences of words in the language (Abdulqader, Murad, & Abdulghani 2017) that can be considered formulaic not due to their idiomaticity but their frequency.

Such a category of frequency-based lexical phrases is demonstrated in a taxonomy that differentiates lexical chunks by their distinctive properties (Wood, 2020):

Table 2

Classification of lexical phrases based on their distinct characteristics

Sequences Distinguished by Structural, Semantic, or Syntactic Properties	Sequences Distinguished by Pragmatic Utility	Sequences Distinguished by Their Distribution in Corpora
Collocations	Lexical Phrases Pragmatic Formulas	Lexical Bundles
Idioms		
Metaphors		
Proverbs		
Compounds		
Phrasal Verbs		

Note. Wood's taxonomy of lexical phrases, adapted from Wood (2020, pp. 31-36).

Lexical bundles (LB) are a subcategory of formulaic language and an example of the new discoveries of the frequency-based approach. LBs are defined as sequences of "of three or more words that show a statistical tendency to co-occur" (Biber & Conrad, 1999, p. 183). Contrary to other formulaic sequences, "lexical bundles are usually not structurally complete and not idiomatic in meaning" (Biber & Barbieri, 2007, p. 264). Instead of relying on native speaker intuition and degree of idiomaticity when determining their formulaicity, these MWIs are identified via analysing a wide range of authentic corpora (Nekrasova, 2009). Nevertheless, due to the difficult identification of MWIs, it can prove constructive to apply several different methods to assert formulaicity (Wood, 2020).

In recent years, LBs have become one of the focal points in corpus linguistics and thus have been receiving an increasing amount of attention in other linguistic fields as well. One area that can apply corpus-driven research on LBs particularly well is language pedagogy. LBs can prove useful when incorporated into the L2 syllabus as they "are clearly useful devices for the comprehension and construction of discourse" (Biber & Barbieri, 2007, p. 284), and this advantage stems from their core characteristic: frequency. LBs appear in over 80% of English spoken discourse, and their most important asset lexically is their repetition (Crossley & Salsbury, 2011). Several studies examined correlation between the knowledge of LBs and language competence and produced positive results (e.g., Chan & Baker, 2010; Pang, 2010; Crossley & Salsbury, 2011).

2.5 Theoretical base: Describing the Lexical Approach

In collecting the different benefits of lexical phrases for English learners, this paper draws on the concept of the LA, a new method for foreign language instruction set forth in the early 1990s. In *The Lexical Approach: The state of ELT and a way forward* (Lewis, 2002), the first three key principles of the approach are listed as the following:

- Language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar.
- The grammar/vocabulary dichotomy is invalid; much language consists of multi-word 'chunks'.
- A central element of language teaching is raising students' awareness of, and developing their ability to 'chunk' language successfully. (p. vi)

The LA establishes that language is made up of MWIs, and effective and successful foreign language acquisition depends on the ability of the learners to recognise and utilise these chunks (Lewis, 2002). The very foundation of the approach is best defined by the following statement:

The standard view divides language into grammar (structure) and vocabulary (words); the Lexical Approach challenges this fundamental view of language. Instead, the Lexical Approach argues that language consists of chunks which, when combined, produce continuous coherent text. (Lewis, 2008, p. 7)

In the English language, 58.6% of spoken and 52.3% of written discourse is comprised of formulaic sequences (Erman & Warren, 2000). This data demonstrates the salient nature of lexical phrases and supports Lewis's claim on their importance in SLA. This claim is further supported by a study investigating the impact of the application of the LA (Abdulqader et al., 2017), which found that the incorporation of lexical phrases into L2 teaching enhances the communicative skills of learners.

3 Benefits of lexical phrases in English language learning

Having discussed the theoretical background to formulaic language, I will now move on to addressing different ways in which it contributes to L2 production. Even before the LA was presented, several studies had been published that tackled the advantageous nature of formulaic language. By synthesising existing research and literature, this chapter enumerates and describes the chief means by which lexical phrases can aid L2 acquisition and production.

Good understanding and command of lexical phrases are among the fundamental building blocks of effective L2 acquisition (Wray, 2000). Wray (2002) presents a list of how formulaicity benefits the speaker's production as well as aids the hearer's comprehension. Figure 1 was adapted to highlight the aspects of MWIs that promote language production.
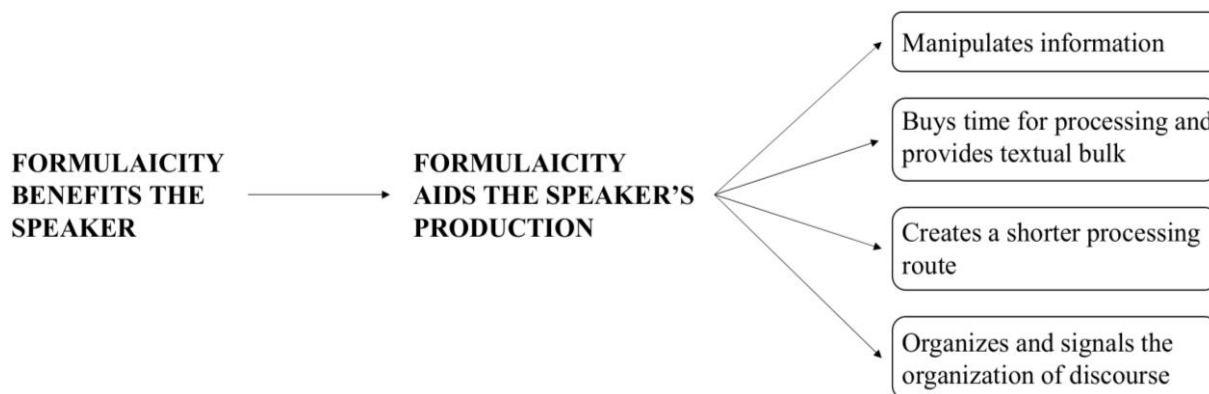
Figure 1. The benefits of formulaicity for the speaker, adapted from Wray (2002, p. 97).

This paper also explores the ways in which formulaicity benefits the speaker; however, the overall structure of the thesis is organised considering different aspects, while still incorporating parts of the list compiled by Wray (2002).

3.1 Economy of choice and the Idiom Principle

The first and potentially the greatest (Lewis, 2002) benefit lexical phrases provide is the economy of choice, from which other complementary advantages derive. By having ready-made formulas available, speakers can produce language with ease, as they lower the number of choices the speaker has to make. That is particularly useful for L2 learners as the narrowed range of choices allows them to focus on other aspects of language production, such as pronunciation or intonation. Perkins (1999, as cited in Wray, 2002) claims that "the simple processing principle of the economy of effort" (p. 16) is the reason why formulaic language makes up the majority of discourse.

Sinclair (1991) argues for the necessity of recognising two different types of interpretation when observing the relationship of text and meaning. He proposes two approaches: the Open-choice Principle and the Idiom Principle. The Open-choice Principle

interprets language as a result of many complex choices made by the user, chiefly used in constructing grammar. He describes it as a "'slot-and-filler' model, envisaging texts as a series of slots which have to be filled from a lexicon which satisfies local restraints" (p. 109). In contrast to the Open-choice Principle, the core of the Idiom Principle is the assumption that the speaker has access to a great amount of "semi-preconstructed phrases that all constitute single choices" (p. 110). Effectively, this means that the speaker produces the same amount of language with less effort – less choices made in the process – than what would be needed with the Open-choice Principle. This assertion was a cornerstone in investigating the processing and benefits of multiword units. It can be concluded that Sinclair's Idiom Principle played an important role in motivating linguists to concentrate interest on MWIs in lexical research (Siyanova-Chanturia & Martinez, 2014).

The greatest advantage of formulaic sequences is "lightening the attentional and processing burdens of construction of utterances and allowing for fast and fluid communication" (Wood, 2002, p. 7). As they are stored and retrieved as wholes, speakers produce lexical chunks with the same effort as single units (Xu, 2010). Code (1994, as cited in Wray, 2002) points out that having to compose every utterance from the smallest individual units of language would make it "psychologically impossible for us to produce speech with the same rapidity and proficiency that we are able to" (p. 16), hence the strong generative power and the economising role of MWIs is crucial in language production (Lewis, 2002; Xu, 2010).

3.2 Reducing anxiety

An additional benefit attributed to lexical phrases is their contribution to reducing the speaker's anxiety. This feature is partly a consequence of the economising role of formulaic language. Many learners experience anxiety at the early stages of language acquisition. Foreign

language anxiety is defined as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). Language anxiety is mentioned as one of the greatest obstacles that might hinder students in the process of language acquisition (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). Because of the lack of experience and proficiency, language production can be a particularly overwhelming ordeal for learners. The fear of the inability to correctly produce or comprehend language can lead to anxiety; furthermore, having to juggle new syntax, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation at the same time is a mentally taxing chore. However, it was established in the previous section that learners can retrieve MWIs more efficiently. As a direct result, their efforts can be focused on other aspects of the discourse, such as finding the appropriate register or improving pronunciation. Access to a large collection of chunks does not only help the stress regarding language production to subside, but also decreases the confusion learners face (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018).

In addition to assisting language production, lexical phrases aid language users in the processing of the discourse as well (Wray, 2002) by decreasing the processing load (Kecskés, 2007), which is also instrumental in reducing anxiety. The comprehension of discourse takes place with more ease when learners implement collocation knowledge (Movahediyan & Allami, 2013, as cited in Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018). In the process of communication, nearly as much time is spent listening as speaking; therefore, learning lexical chunks that make the listening process easier contribute crucially to the facilitation of L2 communicative skills (Tang, 2013).

Another way in which lexical phrases can ease the anxiety of learners is by providing "immediate practical utility" (Lewis, 2002, p. 95). The vocabulary/useful phrases sections of travel guides are a classic example for employing lexical phrases for this reason, as with relatively little effort they provide immediate results for the speaker. Having a number of ready-

made structures available expands the communicative resources of the learner at a quick rate (Lewis, 2002). Knowledge of lexical chunks can provide a safeguard for students when dealing with anxiety concerning L2 comprehension or production. Specific categories of MWIs that can prove useful in early language production are sentence frames (e.g., the _____er, the _____er; what surprised me was X because of Y) and institutionalised expressions (e.g., There's a call for you; I see what you mean; How's it going?) (Racine, 2018). Other classes of lexical phrases, such as idioms or similes can make the speaker's language more nuanced; however, that is not the main objective in the early phases of language acquisition. L2 learners gain immediate benefits by learning institutionalised expressions and sentence heads and stems because they carry great communicative power. Moreover, they do so while simultaneously relieving the learner from the task of analysing the inner structure, as these phrases are retrieved as wholes (Wray, 2002).

3.3 Increasing motivation

The practical benefit of early language production can also provide a confidence boost to students, thus increasing their motivation by providing a sense of achievement even at the earliest stages of acquisition. For L2 learners, perceiving themselves as competent persons and experiencing more success than failure both serve as motivation to learn (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Alizadeh, 2016). Prefabricated chunks are retrieved as wholes, so even if a student has not acquired the knowledge of a certain grammar, the internal structure of the chunks already contain it. In other words, lexical phrases put learners at an advantage in the acquisition of structures and thus they are able to utilise language for a broad range of functions. (Hakuta, 1976, as cited in Zhao, 2009). This allows for creative language production, which in turn mitigates frustration and strengthens motivation. (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992).

Considering the benefits acknowledged so far, it can be observed that the advantages provided by lexical phrases do not only support learners in multiple facets of language acquisition but also are closely affiliated with each other and can overlap to a great extent. It would prove a difficult task to distinctly isolate the multifarious positive effects of MWIs. Regardless of this issue, the following sections will further illustrate how different benefits are interconnected to support learners in different ways.

3.4 Promoting nativelike language production

As established in the previous sections of this paper, formulaic sequences are ubiquitous in both spoken and written forms of English discourse. It is evident then, that gaining and mastering knowledge of lexical phrases will be a cornerstone of L2 language acquisition for learners, and the key to achieving nativelike competence. Pawley and Sider (1983) draw a distinction between nativelike selection and nativelike fluency. This thesis does not discuss the aspect of nativelike fluency because in recent years emphasis in research has shifted towards the use of English in a lingua franca context, in which said aspect is less relevant.

Nativelike selection is the linguistic ability "to convey meaning by an expression that is not only grammatical but also nativelike" (Pawley & Sider, 1983, p. 191). In other words, it is the distinction between what could be said, by generating language according to the rules of grammar, and what is conventionally used by native users of the language. Pawley and Sider were among the first linguists to argue for the direct correlation between formulaic language and nativelike selection. The set of grammar rules in English allows for the production of a wide variety of sentences. A speaker can generate several different sentences to convey a certain meaning; however, only a fraction of the possible utterances would sound natural to a native

speaker. Pawley and Sider (1983) provide the example of the familiar phrase "I want to marry you." (p. 196). Some other ways of expressing the same idea are then listed:

- I wish to be wedded to you.

- I desire you to become married to me.

- Your marrying me is desired by me.

- My becoming your spouse is what I want.

- I want marriage with you.

- What is desired by me is to wed you. (p. 196)

The list could be extended almost indefinitely; however, although the sentences listed may sound natural to a varying degree, none of them would sound ever so natural as the original "I want to marry you" (Pawley & Sider, 1983). To sum it up, grammaticality does not necessarily equal idiomaticity, and the latter is undoubtedly a great contributor to achieving nativelike language production.

Language can be described as a "social phenomenon" (Lewis, 2002, p. 90), hence the significance of what sounds natural and nativelike. As much of native discourse consists of formulaic language, native speakers have control over a large number of formulaic sequences (Lewis, 2002). Consequently, knowledge of MWIs can aid L2 learners in producing language similar to that of native users of English.

The most challenging, ultimate obstacle for L2 learners to reach nativelike competency is the mastering of language production that sounds natural and idiomatic (Pawley & Sider, 1983). This is supported by the argument that formulaicity directly correlates with nativelike language use (Kecskés, 2007). Moreover, Wood (2002) explicitly states that performance at a nativelike level is impossible in the absence of command over an array of MWIs. Overall, it

can be concluded that acquisition of lexical phrases is critical for learners to reach a nativelike level of language production.

3.5 Enhancing fluency

Lexical phrases are integral to achieving fluency (Wood, 2002). Authors researching the topic regularly highlight (e.g., Chambers, 1997; Thomson, 2015, etc.) that a distinction has to be made between the commonly used meaning and the linguistic definition of fluency. In everyday use, "fluency is often used to denote general second language (L2) proficiency" (Thomson, 2015, p. 3). When a person is described as fluent in a language, what is usually meant is that said person is a proficient user of the language. However, fluency must be differentiated from overall language proficiency (Chambers, 1997). By contrast, in linguistic research fluency means "the fluidity or ease with which the second language is spoken" (Thomson, 2015, p. 3).

Reaching a high level of fluency would be nearly impossible if language did not include formulaic prefabricated units (Racine, 2018). This further extends the number of benefits lexical phrases can offer to L2 learners. However, it must be noted that awareness of formulaic language alone is not sufficient. For a student to reach a level of advanced fluency, MWIs have to be recalled automatically (Erman, 2009), so that they do not require too much, if any effort at all. Yorio (1989, as cited in Wray, 1999) observed formulaic sequences produced by L2 speakers of English and found that many learners were only able to produce MWIs resembling the correct form, as well as often paired them with an incorrect meaning. He suggests that this is the result of some kind of analysis, during the process of which the students applied erroneous interlanguage rules. This further proves the importance of making the process of recalling MWIs highly reflexive.

Apart from the advantages mentioned in Section 3.1, the economising role of lexical chunks provides benefits concerning fluency as well. By reducing the mental load of having to combine individual words to form sequences, lexical phrases contribute to the fluency of language production to a great extent. A study investigating the effects of the application of the lexical approach reported that using formulaic sequences is beneficial for students (Boers, Eyckmans, & Stengers, 2006). The study found that in addition to fluency, learners' range of expression and accuracy improved as well. A more recent study reported that incorporating lexical chunks into the classroom activities helps to develop the fluency of the students (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018).

Two different types of fluency can be distinguished: receptive and productive (Boers, 2020). The previous paragraphs mentioned the aspects relevant to productive fluency. However, receptive fluency is just as important. The ability to process and comprehend language at a conversational rate is something that L2 learners often struggle with. By making discourse somewhat predictable, lexical phrases offer a guide so the learner can potentially anticipate what will follow (Boers, 2020). Described as "islands of reliability" (Wood, 2001, p. 580), MWIs help students to produce more fluent speech. This is another instance where the benefits of formulaic sequences overlap. As a result of giving some sort of guideline for the progression of the discourse, the knowledge of MWIs also ease anxiety that learners might face.

Classes of formulaic sequences that can prove particularly advantageous for achieving nativelike competency are polywords, specifically phrasal verbs (e.g., take away, hold back) and collocations (e.g., safe and sound, almost certainly, come to a decision, make a mistake). Much of the literature concerning L2 learning and nativelike proficiency identifies the mastery of phrasal verbs as the key to achieving nativelike production. Erman (2009) draws an explicit connection between control over appropriate collocations and L2 fluency. Collocations aid receptive fluency because after hearing the initial part of the structure students can often

anticipate and predict the rest of the phrase. On the other hand, collocations also help the productive fluency of the learner. The knowledge of collocations reduces the mental processing load by limiting the options available for expressing a certain meaning, allowing for more fluent language production.

3.6 Additional benefits

In addition to their economising role, and the ability to reduce anxiety, increase motivation, promote nativelike language production, and enhance fluency, MWIs have even more benefits to offer to learners. The complexity and creativity, as well as the accuracy of the language produced by learners can be improved by lexical phrases.

3.6.1 Assisting creative language production

The description of lexical chunks as "prefabricated" (Wray, 2000, p. 465) and "predictable in form" (Wray, 2002, p. i) suggests that they are rigid, inflexible structures. However, even though formulaicity entails a certain level of fixedness, it does not impose a complete lack of variation in MWIs (Filatkina, 2018). On the contrary, variation and modification of a MWI demonstrate its formulaic quality (Filatkina, 2018). Thus, it can be concluded that lexical phrases are subject to variation; furthermore, that is essentially one of the qualities that make them beneficial for learners. Sentence frames, although relatively limited in number, allow for the production of a large variety of sentences by filling in the 'slots' these frames provide (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). One example presented is "I'm (not) (absolutely/pretty) sure/positive/certain (but I think) (that) X" (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 26). This demonstrates how the familiar phrase *I'm sure* can be modified in different ways, resulting in a wide variety of meanings that all stem from the same framework. This way,

creativity of language production is ensured, as learners can fill in the slots in a way they want to, while still being supported by the sentence frames. In addition to sentence heads and frames, knowledge of idioms, similes, and proverbs can make language use more creative and complex. Knowledge of these classes of MWIs does not only make speech more idiomatic, but also promotes the production of more diverse and sophisticated language.

3.6.2 Improving accuracy

Accuracy can be defined as "the extent to which an L2 learner's performance deviates from the norm" (Housen, Kuiken & Vedder. 2012, p. 4). Formulaic language also helps to improve the accuracy of learners, described as "an important resource to mastering the syntax" (p. 96) by Lewis (2002). When lexical phrases are learned and retrieved as wholes, the students subsequently master the grammar the MWIs contain, which contributes to more accurate language production. One supporting evidence is a quantitative study by Assassi and Benyelles (2016), which found a positive correlation between the improvement of learner's formulaic language acquisition and the improvement of their language accuracy. Measurements of Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF) are commonly employed together to determine language proficiency (Michael, 2017), and the present paper has demonstrated that knowledge of lexical phrases can support the development of learners in all three aspects.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the main advantages provided by formulaic language to learners. Taken together, these data suggest that learning lexical chunks can improve productive and receptive language skills and develop overall communicative competence. Figure 2 summarises the main benefits described in the chapter.
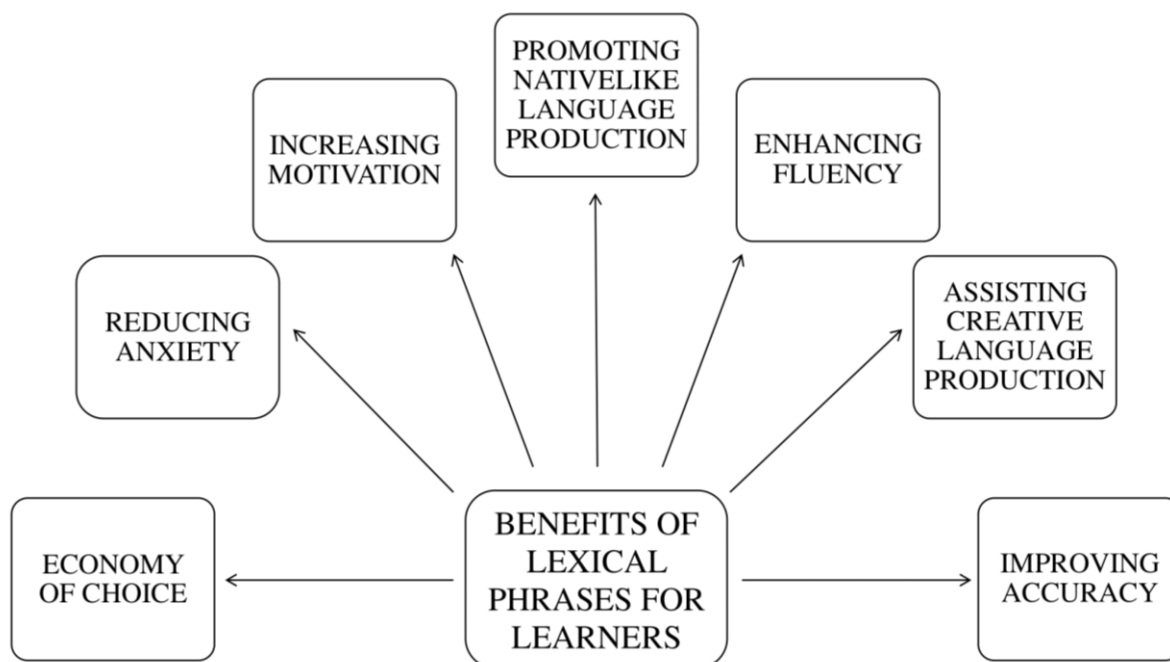
Figure 2. Summary of the main benefits of lexical phrases.

4 Pedagogical implications

Thus far, this thesis has collected ample evidence that lexical phrases are important and beneficial tools in language acquisition that need to be included in classroom L2 teaching. As with all curricula, appropriate delivery is of considerable significance, especially as there are some issues that might arise in the process. Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature that aims to help language instructors to successfully implement a formulaicity-based approach. The final section of this paper presents different means and strategies through which formulaic language can be incorporated into the curriculum, as well as addresses possible issues regarding the topic.

4.1 Application of the Lexical Approach

It was not until the early 1990s that linguistic research discovered and articulated the importance of recognising and utilising lexical phrases in L2 instruction. Ever since then, many papers have been published discussing what methods are the best suited for this purpose. Section 2.5 gave account of the main features of the LA; this section presents means of integrating it into classroom practice.

Language pedagogy makes a distinction between input, i.e., what is presented by tutors for the learners, and intake, i.e., the input the learner actually absorbs (Corder, 1967). That differentiation is crucial in the application of the LA as well, as language development is a result of the latter. Consequently, awareness-raising is one of the main aspects of effectively teaching lexical chunks (Fu, 2016; Abdulqader et al., 2017; Lewis, 2008). Instructing learners to look out for MWIs in schoolwork, as well as the L2 media they consume (e.g., books, television, YouTube videos, etc.) can be a successful method for raising awareness (Hellman, 2018; Abdulqader et al., 2017). A small-scale study by Abdulqader et al. (2017) found that keeping a notebook for the new lexical items also contributes to the acquisition of MWIs. In addition, students can work with various layouts that help them to take notes of formulaic structures efficiently and practically (Lewis, 2008). However, one major feature of lexical phrases that should be taken into consideration by teachers is their relevance. It is important not to overwhelm students with MWIs that are not useful for their communicative purposes. Teachers should provide formulaic sequences that can be effectively utilised by learners, and stress their functionality (Hellman, 2018).

Another helpful tactic is to handle lexical phrases as if they were long words. Hellman (2018) emphasises an important feature of MWIs: phonological unity. She exemplifies this with the phrase "How are you?" (p. 6) which has a stress pattern similar to that of a three-syllable word; so, it has to be stored and retrieved as a whole for the most effective language production.

Similarly, when translation is used as a teaching strategy, the exercises should focus on chunk-for-chunk translation, instead of direct word-for-word translation (Lewis, 2008).

Employing corpus-based technologies can also help teachers in the application of the LA. Teachers have access to an increasing number of corpora on the internet they can use for introducing lexical phrases in a natural context (Lewis, 2008). Learners can also be encouraged to compile their own corpora of relevant phrases with different tools, such as concordancers (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2020). Writing scripts that incorporate the previously collected lexical phrases, and roleplaying activities based on the scripts can also contribute to effective acquisition (Hellman, 2018). These methods all contribute to the "autonomous discovery" (p. 5) of chunks, which plays a crucial role in mastering formulaic language (Racine, 2018).

4.2 Critical issues

Despite the functional nature and prevalence of formulaic sequences, they often get overlooked in L2 teaching (Wolter, 2020). One possible explanation for that is the lack of agreement on the ideal means of incorporating them into the curriculum (Biber & Barbieri, 2007). Many linguists address a variety of issues concerning lexical phrases. Wood (2020), for example, questions the relevance of classifying formulaic language. Moreover, he hypothesises that different categories of lexical phrases might need different approaches, because they might be processed differently. He also challenges the current frequency-based approach in phraseology, finding it an insufficient means to determine formulaicity.

Several authors deal with the difficulties that might occur and the problematic areas teachers must be wary of in the process of implementing the LA. Lewis (2008) calls for communication with native speakers, so students can acquire lexical phrases from their natural context. However, Tang (2013) points out, that natives, upon interaction with a non-native

speaker, often refrain from the use of formulaic language to accommodate the learner. The consequent lack of exposure to formulaicity could prove an obstacle in the path of acquisition.

Deciding between implicit and explicit teaching methods is another crucial aspect of teaching formulaic language. Nekrasova (2009) argues for the benefits of explicit teaching methods, while Erman (2009) suggests that both explicit and implicit methods are instrumental for their various advantages. Fu (2016) calls for the use of more practical teaching materials instead of theoretical ones. These suggestions align with the previously mentioned studies that emphasise the importance of awareness-raising techniques.

Finally, practicality of the material and proper presentation also have to be taken into consideration. Learners have to be exposed to MWIs multiple times in a set period of time for acquisition to take place (Boers, 2020). It is not only the distance in time, but also the syntagmatic distance that matters. Boers (2020) illustrates this point with the utterance "because of a criminal offence he was believed to have committed years ago" (p. 146), in which "commit" and "offence" may be too far apart for the learner to observe their collocational nature. Classroom time is limited, so careful selection of the lexical phrases to be included in the curriculum is crucial in order to ensure their acquisition.

5 Conclusion

In the English language, much of spoken and written discourse consist of formulaic language. Despite the pervasive nature of lexical phrases in English, the subject of phraseology displays a significant variation in terms used to describe MWIs, as well as lacks conclusive classification. In previous studies, different definitions and categorisations were provided for lexical chunks. In recent years, the formulaicity of language has been chiefly determined using

developing computer-based corpus technologies. The acquisition of lexical phrases offers several benefits for learners of English due to their functionality and pervasiveness in the language. It is therefore essential that L2 students master the use of formulaic sequences.

The aim of the present thesis was to review the concept of formulaic language and to present the benefits it provides for learners of English. The LA is a recent concept in foreign language teaching that utilises the beneficial nature of formulaic language and the means by which it can support students. Firstly, the use of lexical phrases narrows the set of choices during language production, making the process easier for the learner. Consequently, formulaic sequences reduce the learner's anxiety by decreasing the processing load. Secondly, MWIs provide support even at the earliest stages of language acquisition, thus contributing to the increase of learners' motivation. Moreover, they assist the speaker in producing nativelike language by promoting nativelike selection. Lastly, lexical phrases contribute to improving the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of the language produced by learners.

Overall, this thesis strengthens the idea that MWIs play an indispensable role in SLA, providing several advantages for learners. However, the LA and its integration into classroom practice still poses a few problems for tutors and researchers alike. Further work is needed to establish a universal framework to simplify and unify both the terminology and taxonomy of formulaic sequences, which would assist linguists, teachers, and students as well. Furthermore, a greater focus on formulaic language in both the official curriculum and coursebooks is needed. Developments in this area would support teachers in compiling the material and consequently help to facilitate the acquisition of lexical phrases for all learners.

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