

## THE ROLE OF FORMULAIC SEQUENCES IN ORAL FLUENCY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup>Sophomore Talle VACALARES and <sup>2</sup>Charito G. ONG

<sup>1</sup>Teacher Education Department, Opol Community College

<sup>2</sup>University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines

<https://doi.org/10.59009/ijlllc.2024.0061>

---

### ABSTRACT

Oral fluency is an essential aspect of language proficiency that is often neglected in communicative language classrooms. Formulaic sequences, which are fixed expressions or structured sentence chunks, can aid in achieving higher levels of fluency. This study explores various forms of formulaic sequences that non-native English speakers use in their oral discourse to measure fluency. These include phrasal verbs, lexical bundles, collocations, idioms/phrases, and song lyrics/titles. The researchers immersed in the field and observed forty (40) senior high school students to determine the most commonly used formulaic sequences in their speeches. The data was triangulated to validate and analyze nuances of the speech, including focus group discussions, classroom observations, and individual interviews. The findings indicated that phrasal verbs were the students' most commonly used type of formulaic sequence, followed by lexical bundles, collocations, idioms/phrases, and oxymora. Songs were the least common source of formulaic sequences. The individual interviews revealed that exposure to formulaic sequences improved oral fluency, even with some irregularities in phrasing and pauses. Overall, the study suggests that formulaic sequences play a vital role in enhancing oral fluency among non-native English speakers. The results also recommend encouraging learners to use formulaic expressions in all aspects of their language learning.

**Keywords:** Formulaic sequences; Oral fluency; Data triangulation; Ethnography.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is crucial to learning a language, as it enables individuals to communicate effectively with others in different settings. To achieve language proficiency, learners must develop skills in different aspects of language, including grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. In the Philippines, where there is a growing desire to participate in the international community (Ong, 2017), the ability to speak English has become increasingly important. Along with Filipino, English is an official language used in publications, media, and academia, and fluency in English can improve one's chances of getting a good job. However, learning a language is a complex process that requires mastering various components, such as grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills (Ella, 2018).

Despite the difficulties, Oberg (2013) suggests that oral fluency can be improved by using formulaic sequences, which are multiword language chunks stored in long-term memory. These sequences can be retrieved quickly, making them useful for language learners who may be under pressure. Studying formulaic sequences can also aid in better managing speech production and improving listening and reading comprehension. Boers & Lindstromberg (2012) further posit that incorporating formulaic sequences into teaching methods can enhance comprehension, oral fluency, and written discourse, leading to the development of second

language usage in academic settings. Therefore, incorporating formulaic sequences in language instruction can be a promising approach to improving language learners' proficiency and fluency in both oral and written communication.

Several research studies have examined the function of formulaic sequences in language acquisition. For instance, Boers et al. (2006) conducted a small experiment that showed that an instructional method emphasizing the "noticing" of formulaic sequences helped language learners add such phrases to their linguistic repertoire, which improved their oral proficiency. Similarly, Wood (2010) suggests that ready-made chunks play a significant role in second language acquisition and production. In the Philippines, there is a growing concern about deteriorating performance in oral fluency among students, despite the significance of English as a medium of instruction. The prevalence of local dialect and code-mixing in the classroom has raised questions about the English proficiency of Filipinos and the need to find better ways to engage students in language learning through classroom activities and teaching strategies.

The present study seeks to explore formulaic sequences' role in ESL learners' oral fluency. The results obtained from this study are anticipated to make a significant contribution to the advancement of language pedagogy by providing insights into the challenges encountered by ESL learners and language teachers. Such insights can subsequently be utilized to develop more effective language teaching strategies and classroom activities, thus facilitating the process of language acquisition and enhancing the overall language proficiency of learners.

## **2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

Formulaic sequences play an important role in language learning, making the text and speech more comprehensive and less repetitive and enhancing oral fluency. According to Wray (2002), formulaic sequences can be used as a learning strategy in children, who tend to unconsciously integrate words, phrases, and chunks of sentences stored in memory during times of pressure. Children are naturally inquisitive and learn by observing and listening to their environment. As a result, certain vulgar and foul words and phrases perceived from their surroundings can be incorporated into their future dialogue.

First (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition in children is largely influenced by attending to formulaic sequences in language input, adapting them for use, and later segmenting and analyzing them (Wood, 2002). Therefore, it is important to incorporate formulaic sequences in language learning activities for children to develop their language proficiency. Wood highlights the significance of formulaic sequences as a learning strategy for children's language development and the need for educators to integrate them into language instruction to enhance language learning effectiveness.

The employment of formulaic language in the acquisition of a second language (SLA) has piqued the attention of scholars. In a study by Ping & Fenrong (2010), the relationship between learners' use of formulaic language and their oral fluency was examined. The objective of the study was to examine if there existed any disparities in the oral fluency indices and chunk usage of the participants between the beginning and end of a school year, as well as to ascertain if a relationship existed between the proficiency of the participants in using chunks and their oral fluency.

Furthermore, the study's findings reveal significant distinctions in four aspects of fluency: speaking speed, phonation-time ratio, average length of uninterrupted speech, and typical duration of pauses (Ping & Fenrong, 2010). Additionally, there was a considerable uptick in both the quantity and recurrence of language segments over the study's duration. The research further discovered a strong association between the number of chucks employed by learners and their speaking speed, phonation-time ratio, average length of speech runs, pause duration, and speech accuracy. On the other hand, the frequency of chucks showed a negative correlation with the proportion of edited speech to total speech length. Therefore, no correlation was observed between chucks usage and speech complexity.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the functional and significant role of the social interaction category of formulaic sequences in language use. Wray (2000) suggests that one of the important functions of formulaic sequences is to facilitate fluency and maintain turn-taking during social interactions. To achieve this, it is necessary to familiarize and memorize various formulaic sequences that enable speakers to quickly join in a conversation, respond to and elicit feedback, and maintain the flow of communication without resorting to fillers or pauses. The memorization of formulaic sequences allows speakers to respond accurately to the encoder or receiver's comprehension and to sustain their turn while formulating the next point. However, in some situations, constructing a unique utterance may not be possible or practical, and formulaic sequences may not be readily available. In such cases, second language speakers are advised to use non-verbal language or short responses such as "okay," "yes," or "no" to signal agreement or lack of quick reply.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study utilized an ethnographic approach to determine the phenomena through direct observation. Moreover, by integrating both qualitative and quantitative research components aids in investigating the use of formulaic sequences among research participants in observing oral fluency. The research process was symbolized as qualitative and quantitative (or mixed method), as suggested by Morse (1991). An exploratory analysis was conducted to determine and explore the frequency of occurrence of formulaic sequences in classroom oral activities and how it affects students' fluency. To triangulate the results of this study, three research tools were utilized: focus group discussion (FGD), individual interviews, and classroom observation.

#### **3.2 Respondents of the Study**

This research employed a convenience sampling method to select forty (40) participants from Senior High Schools in Opol, Misamis Oriental, with ten (10) students per class. These participants had completed Junior High School education in various institutions, and their learning environment had influenced their English proficiency. Since English is one of the official languages in the Philippines, communication in English was necessary for these students to prepare them for tertiary education. The primary objective of this method was to ensure the quality of observation and interaction with the participants during individual interviews and focus group discussions. The researchers also observed classes to gain insights into the learning environment and teaching pedagogy of the teachers and to determine how the students were utilizing formulaic sequences.

#### **3.3 Research Procedures**

The researchers obtained permission from the school principals before commencing the study. They employed convenience sampling techniques to select participants from two academic

strands: Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), and Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM). Informed consent and an explanation of the study's purpose were provided to the participants. Triangulation research methods, including observation, interviews, and focus group discussions, were used during the respondents' available time to investigate the use of formulaic sequences in the oral discourse of these students. Over nearly two months, the researchers immersed themselves in the learning environment and utilized video and audio recorders to document the discussions. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed for potential formulaic sequences using interviews and focus group discussions. The primary objective of this approach was to ensure the quality of observation and interaction with the participants during individual interviews and focus group discussions. An open-ended questionnaire was utilized to facilitate the organization and flow of the group and interview sessions.

### 3.4 Research Instrument

The study used a group environment for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to promote student collaborative work. The researcher acted as a discussion facilitator, note-taker, and observer. To avoid biases, the Fluency Scale Ordinate Corporation by de Jong and Hulstijn (2009) was used to evaluate the student's oral fluency during the interviews and FGD.

The researchers conducted a One-to-One Interview using framed questions adapted from Brown (2004) with four phases: warm-up, level check, probe, and wind-down and closure, which aimed to facilitate a comprehensive and in-depth discussion of the topics while building trust and rapport with the interviewee. To achieve this, the researchers followed the recommendation of Ryan et al. (2009) to establish rapport and trust from the beginning of the interview process to help the interviewee feel relaxed, comfortable, confident, and attentive. The four phases of the interview method were utilized to build rapport and trust, resulting in a more effective and comfortable consultation process.

The study utilized Classroom Observation to investigate teaching strategies for generating formulaic language among language learners. The researcher observed various teaching styles and materials such as chalk talk, group dynamics, media, and instructional materials like books, handouts, magazines, and movies. The rubric from Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching by Anita Archer and Charles Hughes (2011) was adapted to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. The rubric had different levels related to the delivery of the teacher's lessons to the language learners. Student engagement in the discussion was highly observed during the study.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated how formulaic sequences can improve students' oral fluency. The research started with a Focus Group Discussion to evaluate the oral fluency of the participants and identify frequently used formulaic sequences in spoken language. The researcher also observed how teachers promoted using these sequences during class lessons. Lastly, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to confirm the data collected from the previous methods.

The table shows the percentage distribution of formulaic sequences used in a focus group discussion. The majority of the respondents used phrasal verbs to express their ideas. The most commonly used formulaic expression was *put on*, followed by *look up*. The use of phrasal verbs was consistent with previous studies by Steyn & Jaroongkhongdach (2016) on

young learners in academic discourse. Students used Song lyrics as the least in their communication process, as seen in the table. Only two out of forty respondents incorporated songs into their conversation. Although the respondents may have been exposed to English music, they needed help integrating song lyrics into communication situations. The participants struggled to express their ideas in English and frequently resorted to code-mixing. The participants were influenced by their peers and may have been hesitant to express their honest opinions for fear of disappointing the moderator.

**Table 1: Potential Formulaic Sequences in the FGD Sessions**

Type of Formulaic Sequences	Specific Examples Gathered	No. of Occurrence	% of Occurrence
	<i>In a nutshell, poverty is not a hindrance to success, don't lose</i>		
Idioms/ Phrases	<i>hope, Love yourself, Poorest of the poor, Live our life to the fullest, On the same page, hitting two birds in one stone, to see the big picture, piece of cake, we are in the same boat</i>	56	<b>4.43</b>
Collocations	<i>Physical appearance, fake news, family problem, unique picture, weak person, easy access, best practices, collaborative effort, key issues, top priorities, share experiences, take into account, good person, hard worker, positive attitude, creative mind, good listener, immediate family, family values, family vacation</i>	208	<b>16.44</b>
Phrasal Verbs	<i>Keep on, go in, get in, put on, go back, cope with, give up, give in, speak up, look into, figure out, bring up, fill in, take up, run into, grow up, work out, call off, carry on, come across, cut off, put on, take off, get over, look up, set up, bring in, care for, take care of, hand in, look up, fill up</i>	678	<b>53.60</b>
Lexical Bundles	<i>I think, I(they) don't know, as a matter of fact, it turns out, in other words, as far as I'm concerned, I don't like, with regards to, by the way, due to the fact, in order to, at the end of the day, in general, all in all, in general, we all know, it is not good, when it comes to, when I was,</i>	286	<b>22.61</b>
Oxymoron	<i>Selfless ego, free wall, living dead, deafening silence, clearly confused, awfully great, united division, lonely crowd, sweet sorrow, unreliable friend, painful pleasure, wise fool, student teacher, accidentally on purpose, found missing</i>	35	<b>2.77</b>
Songs	<i>I remember the day, All my life</i>	2	<b>0.16</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,265</b>	<b>100</b>

The students had difficulty generating meaningful formulaic sequences in their communication tasks, particularly in using idioms and oxymora while making semantic connections. Instead, participants tended to focus on translating from their L1 to L2, relying on filled pauses and non-lexical sounds to think and translate during the communication process. Using phrasal verbs and lexical bundles is an effective strategy for students to speak more fluently in their second language. Students use these pre-made chunks to save effort and respond quickly to questions. However, they often pause after using these phrases.

Furthermore, the table presents the findings from a focus group discussion with 40 senior high school students, revealing that Phrasal Verbs and Lexical Bundles were the most frequently used formulaic sequences, while Collocations and Idiomatic Expressions were used to a lesser extent. The use of Oxymora and Songs in the communication process was also analyzed, with Oxymora being rarely used due to their complexity and Songs being the least

used sub-category of formulaic sequences. During the discussion, code-mixing occurred as students faced challenges expressing ideas in English, influenced by their peers and hesitant to share honest opinions. Pauses and fillers were used as students translated from their first language (L1) to English (L2) during communication. To improve vocabulary acquisition in a lifelong learning setting, explicit teaching and exposure to extensive lexical input, including formulaic sequences, are essential.

#### 4.1 Exploring Formulaic Sequences in the Lesson

The researchers conducted classroom observations for a month to ensure the reliability and validity of the data-gathering process. The classes were conducted in English, and the researchers took notes and audio-recorded the classes. The Beginning/Preparation, Middle/Content, and End/Evaluation stages of the lesson were observed. To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching, the researcher modified the Likert Scale of Effective and Efficient Teaching by Archer and Hughes (2011) to create a classroom observation tool specific to this study.

**Table 2: Occurrence of Formulaic Sequences in the Three Parts of the Lesson**

Part of the LP	Observation		Interpretation	Common FSs
	Mean	SD		
Beginning	4.06	0.60	Most of the Time	<i>Set up, put on, work on, keep on, take in, sum up, put together, run into, hang out, catch up, go ahead, turn off, get up, bring up, look forward to</i> <i>As you can see, in my opinion, as a result, in order to, with regards to</i> <b>PV (198), LB (82), C (68), I/P (23), O (18)</b>
Middle	3.40	0.67	Some of the Time	<i>Go over, come up with, figure out, put on, give up, take in</i> <i>Let's start with, as you can see, to give you an example, in order to, with regards to</i> <b>PV (36), LB (20), C (17), I/P (9), O (2)</b>
End	4.18	0.60	Most of the Time	<i>Make up, set up, give in, figure out, work out, take in, zoom in, come up with, care for, hand in</i> <i>For example, in order to, it depends on, as a matter of fact, as well as, with regards to</i> <b>PV (212), LB (93), C (74), I/P (26), O (21), S (2)</b>

*Legends: 1.00-2.33 (Not all of the time); 2.34-3.66 (Some of the time); 3.67-5.00 (Most of the time)*

Table 2 presents that formulaic sequences are frequently used at the beginning and end of lessons, with teachers using introductory activities to motivate students and assess their learning at the end. The study also found that teachers varied in their teaching methods when introducing new topics, either inductive or deductive. For example, excerpts in Earth Science and Statistics class:

Excerpt 2 Teacher: *Mr. X, please prepare the materials needed for our experimentation today.*

Student X: *I will set up the apparatus, Ma'am?*

Excerpt 5 Teacher: *How did you come up with your result, Ms. Y? Please explain.*

Student Y: *As you can see, in order to come up with this result you need to ...you need to solve the mean...um... by using this formula.*

*Student S: You put together...um...the numbers!*

Formulaic sequences were commonly employed, particularly at the beginning and end of lessons, with educators employing differentiated instructional approaches to introduce new topics. Excerpt 5 demonstrated the teacher's encouragement for students to articulate their thoughts via open-ended questions and elucidate their responses in English. Essentially, educators afford students greater chances to enhance their communication abilities and spoken fluency by integrating formulaic sequences and prompting them to articulate their ideas via open-ended questions at the onset and conclusion of lessons. However, during the middle segment of the lesson, the teacher predominantly leads the discussion while incorporating closed-ended questions. For example:

Excerpt 8 Teacher: *That's right! Staying motivated can be challenging, but there are several strategies that can help. Can you give me an example?*

Student A: *Goal-oriented, Ma'am!*

Teacher: *Very good! We need to...remind ourselves what keeps us driven sa atong kinabuhì noh [in our life, right?...]...and also create a support system, we need to celebrate our progress, and of course...kailangan nato [we need to] learn from our mistakes.*

In classroom observation, it was noted that in most classes, teachers did not prioritize the development of oral fluency for all students during the middle of a lesson. Instead, they often favored selecting quick or fast learners to answer their questions. The research underscores the significance of classroom observations as a means to grasp the dynamics of language acquisition within a social framework and underscores the necessity for teachers to afford all students opportunities to cultivate their communication abilities.

An observation was conducted in a classroom setting to examine the utilization of formulaic sequences in oral communication among Senior High School students. Analysis of the data indicated that phrasal verbs were the most prevalent form of formulaic sequences, followed by lexical bundles. The study categorized the phrasal verbs employed by the participants and noted their significance in everyday communication, as they contribute richness, intricacy, and engagement to language. Additionally, it was observed that teachers did not allocate sufficient time for activities aimed at enhancing oral communication skills, both during regular lessons and at intermediate points, thereby impeding students' progress in developing their communication abilities and oral fluency. The classroom observation revealed a reliance on a single method for improving students' communication skills, namely responding to the teachers' prompts.

The research also revealed that collocations were the most prevalent form of formulaic sequence, occurring 159 times, followed by idioms and phrases, which were utilized 58 times. The incorporation of collocations and idiomatic expressions can enrich language proficiency and facilitate oral communication. Conversely, phrasal verbs were utilized only 446 times, suggesting a potential necessity for explicit instruction on the concept of orientational metaphors to better grasp and employ appropriate phrasal verbs. Additionally, the study found that students exhibited limited proficiency in English, as evidenced by their resorting to code-switching and mixing during classroom activities.

Furthermore, minimal instances of formulaic expressions were observed in students' oral discourse, accompanied by reduced student engagement in discussions. Teachers predominantly led the conversations, occasionally resorting to code-switching to highlight significant topics. The section also includes a table displaying the frequency of common formulaic sequences identified through classroom observations, offering a more comprehensive overview of the collected data.

**Table 3: The Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Formulaic Sequences Observed in the Classroom**

Formulaic Sequences	Freq	%	Formulaic Sequences Used
Phrasal Verbs	446	49.50	<i>Go up, put on, take off, set up, get up, turn off, bring up, look forward to, give in, come up with, go ahead, get over, figure out, get along, break up, look up, make up, work out, wake up, keep up, drop out, get away, zoom in, take in, grow up, run into, look up</i>
Lexical Bundles	195	21.64	<i>For example, at the end of the day, on the other hand, in order to, as a result of, as well as, in terms of, by the way, to be honest, to sum up, in the long run, as a matter of fact, I don't know, in my opinion, it depends on, with regards to</i>
Collocations	159	17.65	<i>Heavy rain, bright sunshine, ordinary people, break a leg, second hand, fast food, run a business, low price, give a hand, make a difference, pay attention,</i>
Idioms/Phrases	58	6.44	<i>In a nutshell, under the weather, piece of cake, along the way, spill the tea, barking at the wrong tree, did I make myself clear, am I clear</i>
Oxymoron	41	4.55	<i>Open secret, act natural, original copy, bitter sweet, awfully good, random order, all alone, old news</i>
Songs	2	0.22	<i>But I don't remember the feelings anymore, beauty and the beast</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>100</b>	

Tucker (2000) underscored the significance of grasping the classroom dynamic for effective teaching. This study involved observing classes to pinpoint the specific lesson segments where students employed formulaic sequences. Table 4 provides a summary of the findings, detailing the subjects, classes, and instances when participants utilized formulaic sequences. Teachers across diverse subjects, such as Disciplines and Ideas in the Social Sciences, Oral Communication in Context, Career Guidance and Counselling, Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics, as well as Physical Education and Health, integrated group work and reporting tasks to encourage collaboration and teamwork among students.

During these activities, representatives were chosen to discuss group brainstorming outcomes, which functioned as assessments or performance evaluations. According to Corpuz & Salandanan (2011), the concluding segment of a lesson is as crucial as the opening and central parts, as it gauges students' retention of classroom discussions. Teachers employed various concluding tasks like paper-pencil tests, group work, and oral recitations to assess students' comprehension of the lesson.

Conversely, opening activities served as engaging warm-up exercises to motivate student participation and establish the day's tone. These included reviews, video clips, simulations, brainteasers, interactive games, and brainstorming sessions, among others. Corpuz & Salandanan (2011) stressed the significance of these initial and concluding activities as motivational helps and means to evaluate students' grasp of the lesson. It was observed that



teachers involved students in interactive tasks at the beginning and end of lessons across various subjects, fostering social interaction that could potentially facilitate the utilization of formulaic sequences.

**Table 4: Summary of Lesson Parts Involving the Use of Formulaic Sequences**

Subject	Class	Day/Time	Formulaic Sequences		
			Start	Mid.	End
Physical Science	ADIM	Thursday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
	HUMSS	Friday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
Disciplines and Ideas in the Social Sciences	HUMSS	Wednesday/3:00-5:30	✓		✓
	HUMSS	Friday/10:00-12:00	✓		✓
Contemporary Philippine Arts	ADIM	Monday/10:00-12:00	✓		✓
	ABM	Friday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
Reading and Writing	ADIM	Monday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
	HUMSS	Wednesday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
Oral Communication in Context	ADIM	Tuesday/7:30-10:00	✓	✓	
	HUMSS	Tuesday/10:00-12:00	✓	✓	✓
Career Guidance and Counseling	ADIM	Saturday/7:30-12:00	✓	✓	✓
	HUMSS	Saturday/1:00-5:30	✓	✓	✓
Intro. to the Philosophy of the Human Person	ABM	Tuesday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
	HUMSS	Thursday/7:30-10:00	✓		✓
Statistics and Probability	ADIM	Wednesday/7:30-10:00	✓	✓	✓
	HUMSS	Tuesday/3:00-5:30	✓	✓	✓
Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics	ABM	Monday/1:00-3:00	✓	✓	✓
	HUMSS	Wednesday/10:00-12:00	✓		✓
Physical Education and Health	ADIM	Wednesday/3:00-5:30	✓	✓	
	HUMSS	Friday/3:00-5:30	✓	✓	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>

Furthermore, it was observed that teachers dominated the discussion, and students had limited opportunities to talk, with teachers mostly asking questions and using code-mixing to explain key points of the lesson. For example:

Excerpt 13 Teacher: *Today, we're going to tackle the importance...ang importansya sa pag-gamit [the importance of using] of using descriptive language in writing...um...I have here my presentation...kung mo gamit ta sa [when we use the] descriptive language, we help the reader visualize the setting and character...what was it? Why do we need to use descriptive language? Ms. Z, please stand up!*

Student Z: *In order to...um...help bitaw [of course] Ma'am ang [the] reader to visualize the setting and character, Ma'am!*

Teacher: *That's right! Haron matabangan [in order to help]...um...maka-help ta sa mga [to help the] readers in creating visual representation in their mind...um..diha sa ilang hunahuna [in their mind].*

As a result, despite classroom policies mandating English usage, students frequently reverted to their native language, a habit also observed in teachers when questioning students during reporting and oral recitations. This practice impeded the development of English oral fluency and constrained the application of formulaic language learned through social interaction. Additionally, the student echoed the teacher's statements in the provided excerpt. Furthermore, the teacher heavily relied on PowerPoint presentations, often reading and translating text into the native language. Although teachers predominantly led discussions during the middle of lessons, some incorporated group activities and reinforced formulaic language usage post-presentations, contributing to enhanced oral fluency, and aligning with Krashen's input hypothesis.

#### **4.2 Enhancing Oral Fluency through Formulaic Sequences**

The study by Oberg (2013) emphasizes the challenges of learning a foreign language, particularly for Senior High School students who struggle with English as a communication mode. However, focusing on formulaic sequences, which are multiword language chunks, can improve oral fluency. Formulaic sequences are a significant aspect of English discourse and constitute over half of the language used in any discourse. Therefore, mastery of formulaic sequences is crucial for proficient English speakers.

The study utilized a structured interview with four phases to explore oral fluency and formulaic sequences in respondents' speech. Codó's (2009) research on interviews and questionnaires guided the design of the interview, which included critical thinking questions to enhance content validity. The study aimed to understand how participants perceived an object or event and the meaning they attached to it, using interviews as a tool for data collection.

The respondents' use of formulaic sequences in the communication process aided their fluency in the English language. These are subsequently explained by item as follows:

##### **4.2.1 The use of formulaic sequences provided smooth and connected oral communication among the respondents.**

In language learning, teachers and students play a role in improving L2 fluency. Teachers should provide students with techniques that cater to their individual needs. In this study, teachers used formulaic sequences to demonstrate clausal pauses in oral communication and equip students with the ability to evaluate their own L2 use. As previously mentioned in the literature review, formulaic sequences are stored phrases used for effortless and coherent oral communication. The Senior High School students utilized various formulaic sequences such as idioms, multiword metaphors, collocations, phrasal verbs, and chain-based formulas in their communication.

##### **4.2.2 Using the formulaic language of the speech community in which the respondents reside built fluency.**

According to Sinclair (2001), a speaker's oral fluency is often judged based on their understanding of the speech community they belong to. Each speech community has its own set of commonly used formulaic phrases that have unique meanings. In this study, the Senior High School respondents were observed to be part of a strong companionship group that shared a common understanding of their speech community. They used various formulaic phrases in their conversation, such as "I think," "a little bit," "of course," "with regards to," and "for example," which are commonly used in their speech community. This understanding of their

speech community, which includes the use of formulaic sequences, was an inseparable tool that helped these L2 learners enhance their oral communication skills.

#### **4.2.3 Using formulaic sequences avoided awkward and misplaced pauses among the respondents.**

Wood (2006) found that formulaic sequences or language chunks aid in producing fluent speech in second-language learners. Fluent speakers tend to pause at clause junctures or between non-integral parts of a clause, while less fluent speakers pause within clauses due to the cognitive processing loads that come with producing fluent speech. In this study, respondents used language chunks to avoid awkward or misplaced pauses that can signal non-fluency. The research measured fluency by analyzing speech samples, looking at the number of syllables spoken before pausing, and using formulaic sequences versus free-form language. Formulaic sequences are important as they often consist of full clauses, helping to avoid awkward pauses that can indicate non-fluency.

Formulaic sequences are phrases that learners can memorize and use in their communication. The study found that when participants used formulaic sequences, it reduced the number of pauses in their speech and improved their fluency. The study identified common ways in which participants used formulaic sequences, such as repeating them, using multiple formulas, and relying on one formula. The study suggests that formulaic sequences are not just memorized phrases but essential for fluent oral communication. By using these sequences, learners can produce native-like expressions without pauses or unfamiliar word arrangements.

#### **4.2.3 The use of formulaic sequences decreased the respondents' efforts in communication.**

Using formulaic sequences can make communication easier and more efficient, as they are pre-made expressions with readily accessible meanings. This helps reduce pauses and other disruptions in fluent communication, which can hinder language learners. In a study, students used formulaic sequences to fill in pauses and generate fluent speech when expressing their ideas in English. They used these sequences in various activities, such as answering questions in a dyadic activity or as part of an assessment and evaluation. Some examples of formulaic sequences they used include "for me," "something like that," "I believe," "number one reason," "by the way," "you know what," "in our daily basis," "there are several effects," "to formally start the discussion," "to know its purpose," "we are already done," and "one of the problems."

#### **4.2.4 Formulaic sequences helped frame the intent of the respondents' communication.**

It has been observed that formulaic sequences have the ability to elicit specific responses. For instance, in classroom settings, teachers often use formulaic sequences like "Step right up and win points" to motivate students to answer questions and earn points. This framing action of formulaic sequences is common in everyday communication (Kecskes, 2008). This highlights the importance of formulaic sequences in conveying quick and accurate information in everyday conversations.

#### **4.2.5 Formulaic sequences helped reduce signs of non-fluency by providing a shared and common experience between the communicators/ respondents.**

This research focuses on the use of formulaic sequences in giving directions and how small changes in sound can affect the listener's processing and response time. The study found that using "take a" versus "make a" before "left" or "right" had a minor impact but could still increase the effort in processing for the listener. In interviews, students sometimes interchanged

sounds such as /a/ with /e/, which could still convey a similar meaning to the listener. Similarly, in classroom observations, non-native English speakers altered the sounds of /k/ and /d/ in the formulaic expression "make it happen" or "make it better." The study did not focus on correcting these minor observations, but instead, it supported Schramm's Model of Communication, which considers the sender and receiver's fields of experience. If there is no commonality between them, communication may not take place.

#### 4.2.6 Formulaic sequences assisted in quick and efficient communication.

Research has shown that at an advanced level, the use of formulaic sequences for manipulation becomes more focused on effectiveness rather than the actual meaning of the message (Wray, 2000). In observed classes, the use of the non-formulaic utterance "May I pass, please?" compared to the formulaic sequence "excuse me" to move quickly through the room produced different responses. Although both manipulative utterances ultimately gained the same result, the respondent who used "excuse me" received unquestioned movement, whereas the other respondent who used "May I pass, please?" received a quizzical look and an "eh" before the movement occurred. In an individual interview, a student used the formulaic sequence "come again?" instead of saying "can you repeat the question?" which was quicker and provided a continuous flow of conversation. The use of formulaic sequences facilitated quick and efficient communication, highlighting their importance in language use.

Nevertheless, the results indicated a low frequency of formulaic sequence usage, with the majority of responses demonstrating spontaneous language generation. Furthermore, the study found that employing formulaic sequences did not lead to significant enhancements in fluency levels among the participants. Consequently, the study inferred that while formulaic language can be beneficial for enhancing oral fluency, it might not be the optimal strategy for all language learners, especially those whose first language is not English.

Table 5 summarizes the categorization of different levels of fluency by De Jong and Hulstijn (2009) and its relevance to the use of formulaic expressions in improving oral fluency. Based on a one-to-one interview, the usefulness of ready-made phrases in completing tasks with less effort. However, some students struggled with structuring phrases into sentences, suggesting a need for a holistic understanding of language development. The students categorized as Advanced, Intermediate, and Good levels in oral fluency were higher in number than those identified as Limited and Disfluent. Students in the disfluent and limited levels demonstrated poor, slow, and irregular phrasing with few filled pauses in their speech.

**Table 5: The Oral Fluency Scores of the Respondents in Individual Interview**

Oral Fluency Level	Freq	%	Interpretation
Disfluent	4	10.0	Very slow and poor fluency
Limited	9	22.5	Slow and irregular phrasing
Intermediate	15	37.5	Uneven and staccato speech
Good	10	25.0	Average speed yet uneven
Advanced	2	5.0	Appropriate phrasing and word emphasis
Native-like	0	0.0	Smooth native-like phrasing
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	

Students' oral fluency had improved through classroom practice using formulaic sequences, and individual differences such as personality, environment, or speaking style can affect a person's oral fluency in responding to questions. The respondents displayed different

patterns of answering questions, including pauses and word repetitions, which may be attributed to considering various aspects of the language at once. Formulaic sequences were found to be an effective approach to improving oral fluency in the second language classroom. However, only 27 out of 40 students demonstrated intermediate, good, or advanced fluency levels in English, with none reaching native-like fluency.

As students progressed in their language studies, there were changes in the presentation and recognition of formulaic sequences. The students unconsciously repeated sequences of both phrasal verbs and lexical bundles like *go over*, *look forward*, *work out*, *so that*, *with regards to*, etc. The individual interview underscores the importance of considering various aspects of speech when evaluating oral fluency and highlights the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking students in acquiring the language's syntactical rules and structures.

In relation to the formulaic sequences used by the participants in the one-to-one interview, table 6 shows the summary of the commonly used sequences during the oral discourse.

**Table 6: The Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Formulaic Sequences in Individual Interview**

Formulaic Sequences	Freq	%	Formulaic Sequences Used
Phrasal Verbs	629	47.12	<i>Bring up, go out, take care of, get across, put forward, follow up, work out, look into, bring in, go over, take on, break down, give up, figure out, get along, take over, put up, come up with, set it up, get rid of, look forward, look up, hold on, run into, turn down, run into, give up,</i>
Lexical Bundle	395	29.59	<i>I mean, as far as I'm concerned, you know what, at the end of the day, to be honest, in my opinion, the thing is, as a matter of fact, I don't know, I was wondering, that being said, by the way, I think, it's like, in fact, so that, with regards to, for me</i>
Collocations	225	16.85	<i>Make a decision, take a break, pay attention, give advice, take responsibility, make a suggestion, take an opportunity, take it seriously, play a role, win a prize, get to know, take a chance, make an effort, take into account, keep in touch, make a plan, meet the deadline.</i>
Oxymoron	53	3.97	<i>Little big, half true, pretty ugly, virtual reality, open secret, same difference, seriously funny, all alone, alone together, dark light, free love, no good, original copy, true lies, clearly confused, act naturally.</i>
Idioms/Phrases	33	2.47	<i>No turning back, in the same boat, once in a blue moon, get off my back, barking up the wrong tree, under the weather, piece of cake, dog with two tails, cloud 9, back to reality, think before you speak, nothing last forever.</i>
Song	0	0.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1335</b>	<b>100</b>	

This research study examines the utilization of formulaic sequences among ESL learners during individual interviews. It reveals that phrasal expressions were the most commonly employed type of formulaic sequence, followed by lexical bundles and collocations. These sequences were acquired through interactions and written texts and then stored in memory for communication purposes. The study stresses the importance of comprehending collocations, as they enhance language comprehension for ESL learners. While phrasal verbs were frequently used, mastering them proved challenging, and oxymorons were less common

due to their complexity. Therefore, the study emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive teaching strategies to aid learners in mastering challenging language elements and improving oral fluency. Overall, the use of formulaic sequences contributes to enhanced oral fluency and effective communication in English.

The findings from the table suggest that non-native English speakers typically refrain from using idiomatic expressions and multi-word phrases due to the complexities associated with retrieval and processing. Nevertheless, formulaic language plays a pivotal role in enhancing communicative competence and fluency. The research identifies three functions of formulaic language: communicative, production, and learning strategy. Formulaic language enables speakers to produce and process speech more efficiently, reducing thinking time and enhancing language skills. By creatively combining lexical strings and concepts, speakers can enrich their fluency in English, emphasizing rhythm and variety. The study underscores the importance of formulaic language in language learning and teaching.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Language skills are crucial for learning and using a language effectively, enabling people to communicate well in various situations. An ethnographic study was conducted to observe how formulaic sequences are used in classroom conversations. Focus group discussions were used to study how people use these fixed expressions in social interactions. Although participants sometimes struggled to respond, they used phrases, word combinations, and expressions naturally. Different functions of these sequences were identified, similar to what previous research found. In language classes, teachers encouraged discussion despite policies to speak only English, noting that students switched between languages. Skilled speakers used these phrases during activities to speak more fluently. Additionally, one-on-one interviews were conducted to assess speaking skills, with students discussing their lives and language issues. In class, teachers used various activities to improve language skills, with students using different phrases based on the topic. Despite exposure to English, learners still faced challenges in communication, affecting their academic and job performance. Using fixed phrases helped connect thoughts during conversations. With the importance of English proficiency growing, there is a need to improve learners' communication skills.

This study suggests that teachers should encourage students to speak more actively in class and provide opportunities for practice. Teachers' language choices can also affect language learning, so they should focus on teaching common phrases and expressions. Social activities can help reinforce these language skills. Teachers should create a supportive environment for learning and include discussions to encourage the use of fixed phrases while still allowing for individual creativity. Learners should be exposed to English in everyday situations to improve their speaking fluency. Additionally, more research is needed to understand factors affecting fluency and develop better ways to measure it. This study highlights the challenges non-native English speakers face in learning syntax and structures, emphasizing the importance of considering different aspects of speech fluency.

## REFERENCES

- Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient Teaching*. The Guilford Press.
- Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2012). Experimental and intervention studies on formulaic sequences in a second language. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190512000050>
- Boers, F., Eyckmans, J., Kappel, J., Stengers, H., & Demecheleer, M. (2006). Formulaic sequences and perceived oral proficiency: Putting a Lexical Approach to the test. *Language Teaching Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168806lr195oa>

- Brown, H. D. (2003). *Language Assessment Principles and Classroom Practice*. In Pearson Longman.
- Cabigon, M. (2015, November). State of English in PH: Should we be concerned? *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net>
- Codó, E. (2009). Interviews and Questionnaires. In *The Blackwell Guide to Research Methods in Bilingualism and Multilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444301120.ch9>
- Corpuz, B., & Salandanan, G. (2011). *Principles of Teaching 1*, 2nd ed. Lormar Publishing, Inc.
- de Jong, N. H., & Hulstijn, J. H. (2009). *Relating Ratings of Fluency to Temporal and Lexical Aspects of Speech*. Utrecht Institute of Linguistics
- Ella, J. R. (2018). *Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency of Grade 12 students*. DLSU Research Congress. <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/pdf/conferences/research-congress-proceedings/2018/li-11.pdf>
- Frazier, S., & Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587655>
- Kecskes, I. (2008). Formulaic language in English Lingua Franca. In *Explorations in Pragmatics: Linguistic, Cognitive and Intercultural Aspects*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198843.3.191>
- Oberg, K. (2013). *Formulaic Sequences for Improving Oral Fluency* [Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-River Falls]. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/65364>  
<https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/65364/KristopherOberg.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Ong, C. G. (2017). *Digital Story Creation: Its Impact towards Academic Performance*. International Association for Development of the Information Society. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579294.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods. In *Qualitative Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/330063>
- Ping, Y., & Fenrong, G. (2010). Formulaic language and L2 oral fluency. *Foreign Language World*, 1. [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTotat-WYJY201001007.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTotat-WYJY201001007.htm)
- Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2009). Interviewing in qualitative research: The one-to-one interview. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*. <https://doi.org/10.12968/ijtr.2009.16.6.42433>
- Steyn, S., & Jaroongkhongdach, W. (2016). Formulaic sequences used by native English-speaking teachers in a Thai primary school. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand*. Vol. 52, 105–132. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1134682.pdf>
- Tucker, R. (2000). "The project in Perspective," in B. Harley, P. Allen, J. Cummins, and M. Swain (eds), *The Development of Second Language Proficiency*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, D. (2006). Uses and functions of formulaic sequences in second language speech: An exploration of the foundations of fluency. *Canadian Modern Language Review*. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.63.1.13>
- Wood, D. (2007). Mastering the English formula: Fluency development of Japanese learners in a study abroad context. *Japan Association for Language Teaching Publication*, 29(2), 209–230. [https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art3\\_8.pdf](https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art3_8.pdf)
- Wood, D. (2009). Effects of focused instruction of formulaic sequences on fluent expression in second language narratives: A case study. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.
- Wood, D. (2010). *Formulaic Language and Second Language Speech Fluency: Background, Evidence and Classroom Applications*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474212069>
- Wray, A. (2000). Formulaic sequences in second language teaching: Principle and practice. *Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/21.4.463>
- Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*. In *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511519772>

Zaremba, A. J. (2014). *Speaking Professionally: Influence, Power and Responsibility at the Podium* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315700656>