

Formulaic Sequences for Improving Oral Fluency

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, the focus is often on teaching reading, writing and grammar skills while little time is spent teaching speaking skills. This becomes a problem when students need to use English to speak. Many adult nonnative English language learners studying abroad in English speaking countries need an extended time immersed in the language before they are comfortable or even able to communicate with the spoken word effectively. This is not desired by the language learners, and it is not necessary to send these language learners out into the world ill equipped. Oral fluency can be taught and the indivisible multiword language chunks, known as formulaic sequences, are one way to accomplish this goal. This paper addresses this issue by first defining what fluency is and then by identifying, defining and applying teachable communication features to improve oral fluency. The body of this paper compiles the research of many scholars in the fields of oral fluency, formulaic sequences and speech communities. Each one of these fields helps to identify and explain effective approaches and tools for improving English language learners' oral fluency. Combining how oral fluency is understood, what oral communication consists of and where oral communication takes place leads to a greater understanding of how to teach speaking skills. This paper then concludes with a Unit Plan containing four lessons that utilize the above research for practical classroom application. The information in this paper can be applied to create an effective curriculum framework for teaching speaking skills in the ESL/EFL classroom.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mastering a foreign language can be a formidable challenge for learners of any age or experience level, because there are multiple skills and tools needed to be able to communicate in that foreign language. For the foreign language learner, there will be lexical, phonetic, orthographic, syntactic and semantic patterns and functions that may differ little or greatly between the native language (L1) acquired in childhood and the foreign language (L2) being studied later in life. For example, a native speaker of Spanish learning English is going to have to learn that adjectives are placed before nouns in English; whereas in Spanish, adjectives come after nouns. Likewise, a native speaker of English learning Spanish will have to understand that nouns have gender in Spanish which determine the correct article (e.g. *el* or *la* etc.) to be used; where in English, they do not. Many other examples exist that could illustrate this point, but the importance of these differences is that in small and large ways, each idiosyncratic point of a language contributes to the communicative function of that language.

In light of these idiosyncrasies, there is also a big difference between what skills and tools need to be taught to and acquired by language learners depending on L2 proficiency and goals. Those who are just beginning to learn a new language will have to focus on different aspects of the target language than those who have been studying an L2 for years. For example, a beginner will have to spend much more time learning the phonemic system of a language than a more experienced learner. Comparatively, a more advanced learner will spend more time on the complexities of the L2's syntax than a beginner. Therefore, after the basic functions and processes of a language are acquired, many of the nuances and communicative norms of a language can be taught. These nuances and communicative norms are not for every language learner. If the purpose of studying a language is to pass a class, survive on a vacation or

demonstrate interest in another culture, then the nuances and communicative norms of the L2 are most likely not terribly important to this language learner. On the other hand, if studying abroad, relocating to another country or regularly conducting business in the L2 is the goal, then the nuances and communicative norms of a language become very important if not absolutely necessary. Aspects of these nuances and communicative norms in the English language will be the focus of this paper.

In addition to the nuances and communicative norms in an L2, there is another major concern. In my experience as a tutor working with undergraduate and graduate international students at the university level in the United States, I have found a common theme: a lack of oral communication skills. Many of the international students I have tutored have an advanced knowledge of syntax and a strong lexical base, but lack the ability to communicate effectively orally. This is not to say that these individuals are unable to produce oral communication. It is more that they do not have the practice in speaking the language or an understanding of the common formulas found in the language to produce fluid connected speech. This is mostly due to the lack of focus on oral communication skills in their English language learning in their native countries and to the unavailability of extensive time communicating in English in an English only speaking environment. With daily L2 oral communication practice and immersion in the English speaking environment, most of these international students, by the end of their first semester, have made leaps and bounds in their oral communication skill. After this first semester, many of these international students have picked up bits and pieces of idiomatic speech, metaphors and common slang used around campus, but not without some struggle.

This struggle is unnecessary. There is a way to assist L2 learners who are interested in actively using the L2 for the purposes of oral communication. The content of this paper will

address this issue directly by exploring oral fluency and formulaic sequences. In Section 1, the concept of oral fluency will be discussed. In my experience, many L2 learners have the goal of “fluency” in the language they are learning. It is important for language teachers to understand what oral fluency is and how to aid students in achieving it to the best of their ability. After defining what oral fluency is, ways of identifying, measuring and learning oral fluency will be explained. Section 2 will discuss formulaic sequences. Formulaic sequences are phrases that are stored and easily retrieved for smooth, connected oral communication. Formulaic sequences include, but are not limited to, idioms, multiword metaphors, collocations, phrasal verbs and chain based formulas. The various systems of identifying and defining formulaic sequences will be explored in this section.

In Section 3, the speech community will be addressed. A speech community is either an identifiable group of people using language in a way specific to their group or a geographical region of language speakers which consists of certain language use and norms. Different groups of people and different regions of language users produce the same language in unique and specific ways. Language speakers’ oral fluency is often judged by their understanding of the speech communities in which they reside. Also, each speech community has its own formulaic sequences that are most commonly used and/or have their own unique meanings. This paper will explain how formulaic sequences, speech communities and the skills behind oral fluency function together inseparably and can assist L2 learners in improving their oral communication skills. And Section 4 will present a Unit Plan consisting of four lessons for teaching formulaic sequences to improve oral fluency. These lessons will pedagogically apply the information contained in Sections 1-3.

## SECTION 1: ORAL FLUENCY

### 1.1 Oral Fluency Defined

Marian J. Rossiter has compiled the work of many researchers in the article “Perceptions of L2 Fluency by Native and Nonnative Speakers of English” to identify the fundamental qualities of oral fluency for second language learners. A fluent speaker of a language can be defined as an individual who can speak about a variety of topics, at length, with few pauses, while using humor, sarcasm and a range of semantic and grammatical complexities (Rossiter 396). Dell Hymes mirrors this definition by explaining that fluency in a language is demonstrated by “a person who both has the knowledge [of the language] and is unimpeded in its use” (46). And Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 10<sup>th</sup> Edition defines *fluent* in part as “ready or facile in speech” (488). Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, fluency will be defined as a person’s ability to use language to express complete thoughts in a variety of semantic and grammatical forms with ease using appropriate intonation without excessive or unnatural hesitations or pauses. Most native speakers of a language could easily accommodate this definition in their regular language use, and nonnative speakers can achieve this level of language use.

With the above definition in mind, it is important to point out that maybe the most important judge of fluency is the listener. Rossiter identifies that fluency, as defined above, is often not perceived by the listener; only signs of nonfluency are perceived. The signs of nonfluency include but are not limited to rate of speech, self-correction (including false starts and reformulations), self-repetition, frequent pauses (silent and nonlexical), pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, intonation, apparent confidence in using the L2 and overall length of time speaking in a given conversation (Rossiter 397-9). Rate of speech is generally seen as speaking



slowly and is often compounded by self-correction, self-repetition and frequent pauses. These issues can lead listeners to perceive that the speaker is not confident and therefore not fluent in the language. Nonfluent-like pronunciation and intonation can easily be spotted by a native speaker in a very similar way that limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge can also be identified. The information above, compiled by Rossiter, was then corroborated by the research that follows.

Rossiter's study had 24 English as a Second Language (ESL) learners listened to on two occasions ten weeks apart. The learners were all registered in full-time ESL post-secondary classes and actively studied a communicative curriculum based on the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing during this ten week period. The listeners/raters ranged from expert native speakers (professional linguistic educators), native speakers (university students) and nonnative English speakers (Swiss German and Italian native speakers). The speech sample for both occasions was based on a series of eight pictures that the learners had one minute to view and prepare a narration for (Rossiter 400-1). The listeners were given the speech samples to listen to and were asked to judge the fluency based on two categories. The first category contained temporal items including pausing, self-repetitions, speech rate, nonlexical fillers, self-corrections, formulaic sequences and false starts (Rossiter 405). The second category consisted of nontemporal items including pronunciation, segmental, nonsegmental, grammar, vocabulary and confidence (Rossiter 406). The results of this study show that the three groups of listener/raters identified similar concerns with the speech samples with the nonnative listeners/raters being the most critical and the expert natives being the least critical. All three groups identified silent and nonlexical pauses, self-repetition, speech rate, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as the biggest hindrances to fluency (Rossiter 407-8). This study

confirms the previously stated definition of fluency by confirming that fluency consists of the expression of complete thoughts with a variety of semantic and grammatical forms without excessive or unneeded hesitations or pauses. This information is important for identifying what fluency is, but lacks pedagogical application or direction.

David Wood, in the article “Uses and Functions of Formulaic Sequences in Second Language Speech: An Exploration of the Foundations of Fluency,” cites a body of research that depicts pauses during speech differing in placement according to the level of fluency the speaker has in the language being spoken. Fluent speakers make pauses “at clause junctures or between non-integral parts of a clause, while lower-fluency speakers tend to pause within clauses. The pause profile associated with fluency may be an effect of the cognitive processing loads that accompany fluent speech; producing whole clauses and chunks of words [formulaic sequences] directly from long-term memory might help avoid the slow process of producing utterances using controlled processing and word-by-word assembly” (Wood 15). An important part of oral fluency is the use of language chunks that are easy to process and produce. Formulaic sequences, as will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2, are some of those chunks of language that will help students avoid awkward or misplaced pauses, which, as identified by Rossiter above, are one of the most commonly perceived signs of nonfluency.

In this study by Wood, speech samples were taken monthly from eleven English as a Second Language intermediate level university students over a six month period in Canada. The first languages of these students were Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. All of these students were enrolled in ESL classes at the university and lived with English speaking host families. This provided daily study of and sustained exposure to English for the students. The speech samples from the students were based on the students’ retelling of silent movies they were shown, and the

students' fluency was measured based on how many syllables they spoke before pausing and by their use of formulaic sequences vs. a free run of words. The importance of the use of formulaic sequences by these students is that formulaic sequences are often full clauses. The use of formulaic sequences cuts down on the awkward pauses in the middle of clauses that, as identified in the definition of fluency above, are signs of nonfluency. Graduate students in applied linguistics judged the data and corpora from native speaker speech were used to determine which data were formulaic sequences and which were not (Wood 18-20). The results of this study indicate that the participants increased their use of formulaic sequences thus reducing the amount of pausing in their retelling of the movies (Wood 23). Wood found that the students most frequently used formulaic sequences in the following five ways to reduce the amount and length of pauses in their speech:

1. Repetition of formulas in a run
2. Use of multiple formulas to extend a run
3. Reliance on one formula or filler repeatedly
4. Use of self-talk and fillers
5. Use of formulas as rhetorical devices (Wood 24)

The five uses above show that students improve their oral fluency with the application of formulaic sequences. For example, formulaic sequences are not just phrases or chunks of words to be memorized. These sequences can act as bridges which allow language learners to produce automated expressions with native speaker familiarity of meaning without awkward pauses or unfamiliar runs of words. Therefore, formulaic sequences are necessary for the production of fluent oral communication.

## 1.2 Levels of Fluent Communication

Wilga Rivers identifies two levels of language behavior useful for developing fluent communication. The first is “the level of manipulation” and the second is “the level of expression of personal meaning” (Rivers 34). In the first level, language learners focus on specific grammatical or syntactic features of the language. For example, subject/verb agreement or the order in which adjectives come before nouns are focused on at the level of manipulation. These specific closed systems and fixed relationships in the language are best studied intensively and with determination by the language learner and need to be stored in the memory for automated use (Rivers 35). Anyone speaking the English language with proficiency does not spend time thinking about whether it is *the red big box* or if it is *the big red box*. The English language speaker knows, because of the study and automated understanding of the level of manipulation, that it is *the big red box* without hesitation. The level of manipulation differs from the automated use of formulaic sequences because the level of manipulation is contained within a formulaic sequence. For example, the idiom (formulaic sequence) “to kick the bucket” has yet to be manipulated because the verb is still in its infinitive form. Saying “he kicked the bucket” or “he’s gonna kick the bucket” show that the level of manipulation operates within the grammar and semantics of the phrase and not at the lexical level of formulaic sequences. The lexical meaning of “to kick the bucket” has not changed just because the infinitive verb was manipulated. The level of manipulation is nonetheless an important aspect of fluency and is needed for the proper use of formulaic sequences, but is a very basic part of fluency and will not be discussed in any more detail.

Conversely, the level of expression of personal meaning is a situational use of language focusing on “the type of message to be communicated, the situation in which the utterance takes

place, the relationship between speaker and hearer or hearers, and the degree of intensity with which the message is conveyed” (Rivers 34). This second level is the expression and use of the automatized first level. The level of expression of personal meaning is learned and mastered through the creative use of language and this is where formulaic sequences are most beneficial to language learners. Having full clauses at the ready keeps communication fluid and pauses consistent. This use of automatized formulaic sequences can allow language learners the time to formulate the creative or novel parts of conversation that must be made in the moment; thus, avoiding awkward pauses and nonnative-like clausal breaks which would lead to the perception of nonfluency. Rivers continues by stating that “a constant interplay of learning by analogy and by analysis, of inductive and deductive processes” is the key to effective language instruction and learning (36). This is an important point and needs to be discussed in more detail.

Because of the complexity of factors involved in language learning, Rivers emphasizes the need to include both level one and level two in language instruction. Since fluent language production cannot happen without the combination of the two levels, it becomes necessary that the two levels need to be taught explicitly with their independent language skills and combined as classroom activities (Rivers 36-7). Rivers suggests that students be “made aware at every step of the potential for meaningful use in communication of the operations they are learning at the manipulative level” (37). Following this should be the incorporation of communicative activities that reinforce and practice the manipulation of the language (the first level) while challenging learners to use their creativity with the language to express concepts and ideas (the second level). When formulaic sequences are part of a curriculum, both the level of manipulation and the level of expression of personal meaning can be addressed. Verb tenses, for example, could be practiced while formulaic sequences are learned to express creative ideas. Verb tense could be

discussed with the use of a greeting like “how are you?” This greeting could be used to have a conversation about the present or be changed to “how have you been?” to have a conversation about the past. Rivers’ research presents evidence that the most effective language instruction for improving oral fluency should involve classroom lecture explicitly examining both level one and level two skills.

Dell Hymes provides similar evidence to Rivers’ research with the communicative framework. The four parts of this framework are “[1] the components of communicative events; [2] the relations among components; [3] the capacity and state of components; and [4] the activity of the whole so constituted” (Hymes 9). Hymes identifies here the need to understand the individual components of language and how they relate to each other in a similar way that Rivers speaks of the level of manipulation. This is the need of the language learner to study the grammar and vocabulary of the target language as to acquire the tools needed to communicate. This would be the ability of a language learner to correctly use formulaic sequences in regard to overall grammaticality and structure as addressed in the above paragraph with the greeting example. The capacity and state of the components combined with the activity of the whole could be related to Rivers’ level of expression of personal meaning. The language learners’ ability to take these tools needed to communicate and apply them to the skill of speaking by combining the capacity and state of the components with the activity of the whole manifests the expression of personal meaning. In this case, language learners would be using formulaic sequences to participate in conversation while avoiding nonnative-like speech patterns and maintaining the norms of the speech community. The information from Rivers and Hymes offers a framework for teaching oral fluency with formulaic sequences.

### 1.3 Teaching Fluency

Elizabeth Gattbonton and Norman Segalowitz explain that “[t]eachers in many parts of the world are used to highly structured activities such as teaching grammar rules, conducting drills, and teaching vocabulary lists, which makes it hard for them to accept that activities such as games, role-plays, and problem solving with little obvious language teaching purpose can actually count as ‘real teaching’” (327). Games, role-plays and problem solving, which are all aspects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), are excellent and effective ways to teach and practice oral fluency. These kinds of activities offer the learner the freedom to use the language creatively while providing a structure and framework to apply target language items. This is so because oral fluency is often context dependent, and CLT activities offer situations to address different contexts. Therefore, Gattbonton and Segalowitz state that “classroom activities need to meet three specific criteria- the activity must be genuinely communicative and inherently repetitive, and the utterances it elicits for learning must be functionally formulaic” (345). This means that in the process of the classroom activities, the formulaic language being used needs to have a native-like conversational naturalness throughout the activities. Meeting these three criteria will aid in the automatization of the target language for the L2 learner. For example, these authors offer the following three-phase format for teaching oral fluency while using formulaic sequences.

Phase 1 includes the introduction of the formulaic sequences and topics wherein they can be applied followed by CLT activities where students work in pairs or small groups utilizing and practicing the formulaic sequences. The aim of this phase is to have students repetitively use the target formulaic sequences to become familiar with the phrases themselves. Phase 1 would be presented based on the abilities and needs of the students and could include some drill-like

practice (for example, group resuscitation) for less experienced students or simply the presentation of the sequences that are new for more seasoned students. Phase 2 consists of assisting students with problematic sequences by offering ways to gain mastery of the sequences. This would involve the use of tasks geared toward fluency, accuracy and grammatical discovery. In this phase, pronunciation, meaning and grammatical use would be focused on. Phase 1 and Phase 2 could take as long as a 5-10 minute presentation for an advanced class or a full class period for a less advanced class. Phase 3 focuses on using the sequences in contextual conversation activities. The point of this final phase is to take the repetitive practice of Phase 1 and combine it with the explanation and understanding of Phase 2 to simulate and practice the formulaic sequences in the context in which they appear (Gatbonton and Segalowitz 329). Gatbonton and Segalowitz emphasize that the more repetition students have with formulaic sequences in context the more proficient they will become.

John M. Murphy agrees in part with the previous researchers and reviews several possibilities for teaching oral communication. He describes a long list of approaches and methods for teaching oral communication which is far too broad to discuss in full here, but he does offer some specifics for teaching oral communication to intermediate and advanced L2 learners. One of his suggestions is to have students select their own topics of interest and then develop them for oral presentations in front of the class. Students with similar interests could then work together in groups of two or three to create their presentations. The individuals or groups would continue to work on their topics and presentations over several class meetings to practice and improve oral communication skills as class time allows (Murphy 55). This would work really well with teaching formulaic sequences for improving oral fluency because learners would have the opportunity to discover the formulaic sequences that are most commonly used in



the topic they chose. Hopefully, the interest in this topic by the learners will provide the motivation to practice and enough repetition of the formulaic sequences surrounding the topic to improve the learners' oral fluency. Instructors applying the above suggestions could help guide this discovery of formulaic sequences in the creative process of the presentations by assisting the learners with discovering formulaic sequences specific to the content. Instructors could also give feedback after the oral presentations are delivered regarding the use of formulaic sequences and by pointing out nonfluency markers. Frank Boers, June Eyckmans, Jenny Kappel, Helene Stengers and Murielle Demecheleer present some very important evidence concerning teaching formulaic sequences for oral fluency.

The purpose of the Boers et al. study was to see if focusing on teaching formulaic sequences had an effect on the perceived oral fluency of the participants in an experimental group. "In the experimental group, the aim was to direct students' attention towards common word combinations occurring in the texts, whereas in the control group, attention was given to individual words or grammar patterns" (Boers et al. 250). This aim was accomplished when students in the experimental group viewed transcripts of the listening passages or explored assigned texts and then they completed various exercises that focused on formulaic sequences; whereas the control group used the same materials but focused on individual word meaning. The instructors of both groups regularly asked their students to identify language they thought was useful in the materials they had, but the experimental group was encouraged to look at word combinations and the control group was not. This led to the experimental group identifying and discussing formulaic sequences in groups and with the teacher, and the control group identifying and discussing individual words (Boers et al. 252).

As for the results of this study, two sets of two independent judges assessed the recorded speech samples from both the experimental and control groups for oral fluency based on the use of formulaic sequences. Both sets of judges perceived a greater level of formulaic sequence use in the experimental group than in the control group. The results were more apparent in oral responses to a text they had just read than to the question they were asked orally. Also, there was an improvement in oral fluency in each member of the experimental group. Some students in the experimental group did significantly better than the students in the control group. Others in the experimental group did not do significantly better than the control group. But all of the students in the experimental group showed improvement in their fluency over the control group (Boers et al. 254-6). The relevance of this study is twofold. First, learners that focused on formulaic sequences improved their oral fluency to a greater degree than learners that focused on individual words and grammar. Second, this research shows that formulaic sequences can be effectively taught in the classroom, and this can lead to an improvement in oral fluency.

#### **1.4 Self-Awareness/Self-Assessment and Fluency**

An important question to answer concerning teaching or trying to learn oral fluency for English language learners is: How do language learners know if they are speaking fluently or not? One way to address this question is in the article “The Effects of Awareness-Raising Training on Oral Communication Strategy Use” by Yasuo Nakatani. In this article, the effects of oral language performance were measured regarding language learners who were taught awareness-raising strategies. Nakatani’s study consisted of an experimental group of students receiving oral communication strategy training and a control group that did not receive strategy training. The strategy instruction the experimental group of students received consisted of three parts. First, at the beginning of the class, students were given a sheet with specific “Achievement

Strategies” on it for them to review and use with the classroom activities and assignments (Nakatani 79). The achievement strategies on this sheet were classified as help-seeking, modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, maintenance and self-solving.

With help-seeking, the focus is on the language learners’ comprehension of what they have heard though asking for a rephrasing or repetition of an utterance. If a student did not understand an utterance because of vocabulary, grammar, rate of speech or any other reason, the help-seeking through rephrasing or repetition helped the students not only understand what was said but also helped them learn what they missed. Concerning modified interaction, the language learners make confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification requests to ensure what they have said is being understood. This provides students with the opportunity to receive direct feedback on their utterances. Students can then use this feedback to better refine their oral communication. Modified output is when the language learners rephrase their utterance in response to their conversation partners’ responses. This would take place when students do not receive the response they were expecting or when the listener is obviously confused by what was just spoken. The time-gaining strategy is using formulaic sequences to keep a conversation moving. The time-gaining strategy will be discussed in more detail in Section 2. The maintenance strategy consists of language learners’ repetitions of conversation to demonstrate their comprehension of what they have heard. Self-solving strategies are using paraphrases, approximations and restructurings to convey information that they are not sure of in terms of vocabulary and/or structure (Nakatani 81-2). The achievement strategies on this sheet were a reference guide for the students during their conversation exercises.

Second, students were asked to keep a journal containing the strategies they used when speaking. In them, they kept track of what did or did not work for them for their own self-

evaluation. These journals were not turned in or assessed by the instructor, but students were encouraged to use these journals actively in classroom activities. Third, the specific in-class strategy training contained a five step process. The students were first asked to review their previous strategic language use. This involved using their journals and achievement strategy sheets to see what they have tried, not tried, what is working well for them and what may not be working for them. Then, following instructor guidelines, students made presentations in small groups as a kind of brainstorming session to demonstrate how certain oral communication strategies could be used in the task they were given. Next, students briefly rehearsed their use of specific strategies for the task, then performed the task, and lastly, evaluated and reflected upon their use of the strategies (Nakatani 79-80). The control group in this study did the same type of communicative speaking exercises as the study's participants, but without the focus on strategy or the use of reflection. The control group spent more time in class using the target language in pairs and groups than did the participants (Nakatani 80). As shall be demonstrated by the results of this study that follow, there is more to learning fluency than just speaking the language.

The results of Nakatani's study show a significant increase in oral communication by the strategy trained participants over the control group. Regarding the achievement strategies, the participants in the strategy training increased posttest scores over pretest scores in all of the categories (especially modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining and maintenance). The control group stayed relatively the same or decreased in all categories with the exception of maintenance where there was a slight increase. This study also tested for the use of reduction strategies which are ways language learners use less of the target language and more avoidance or native language. These reduction strategies are message abandonment, first-language-based, interlanguage-based reduction and false starts. The participants in this study reduced their use of

reduction strategies in all categories with the largest reductions in message abandonment and first-language-based. The control group on the other hand, increased slightly in all of the categories (Nakatani 83-4). This study demonstrates the importance of teaching language learners different strategies for employing the target language and the importance of reflecting upon their use of the target language throughout their study of it. The use of strategies and reflection is an integral part of gaining higher levels of language fluency.

The research of Diane de Saint Léger takes a closer look at self-assessment of speaking skills and student participation in foreign language classrooms. The participants of this study were ninety 20-25 year old college French III students who were all native speakers of English at an Australian university (de Saint Léger 161). The participants all completed self-assessment questionnaires which consisted of “a combination of multiple choice items, self-rating scales, and open-ended questions” focusing on fluency, pronunciation, turn-taking and vocabulary that were given on the fourth, sixth and twelfth (final) weeks of the semester (de Saint Léger 162). The majority of participants in this research found the self-assessment process beneficial to their increased fluency in French. Some participant comments referred to working harder in the class because of the self-assessment, that the self-assessment was a good way to monitor progress in the class, it encouraged goal-setting, it increased learner confidence in the target language and it increased self-awareness of the language learning process (de Saint Léger 167). Clearly, as indicated by the research of Nakatani and de Saint Léger, the use of awareness-raising activities, such as oral communication strategies and self-assessments, increases not only the skill level of the language learner but also increases confidence in the oral production of the target language. The tools of self-assessment can give language learners the opportunity to objectively rate their

oral language skills while helping them discover their strengths and weaknesses in the target language.

The use of awareness raising and self-assessment can be very beneficial for language learners striving for oral fluency. The process outlined by Nakatani would assist language learners by offering a structured format for learners to follow, but it could also help learners recognize fluent language use in native speaker contact and conversation. The ability to teach individuals how to be aware of specific language patterns and structures can be invaluable to a language learner seeking a high skill level in the target language. The research of de Saint Léger in self-assessment offers a similar benefit for teaching oral fluency. With learners taking an organized and honest self-assessment, a clearer picture of learning can take place. Learners can then focus on their weaknesses concerning oral language production and take advantage of their strengths.

### **1.5 Summary of Section 1**

The understanding and application of L2 fluency is the responsibility of both the teacher and the student. Teachers need to help students identify and practice those techniques that are most closely related to the needs of the individual learners. For teachers, this would be using formulaic sequences to show where clausal pauses happen in oral communication and providing learners with the tools to assess their own L2 use. Using the strategies outlined by Natkatini and the self-assessment ideas of de Saint Léger learners can overcome some, if not all, of the impediments to fluency described earlier while aiding in developing oral fluency skills. The combination of environment (contact with native language use), repetition (the natural use of the L2) and awareness (the tools and techniques to recognize and apply the L2) play the greatest role in the development of oral fluency.

## SECTION 2: FORMULAIC SEQUENCES

### 2.1 Formulaic Sequences Defined

The use of formulaic sequences is an important skill for oral language development. David Wood defines formulaic sequences as “fixed strings or chunks of words that have a range of functions and uses in speech production and communication and seem to be cognitively stored and retrieved by speakers as if they were single words” (14). Alison Wray defines formulaic sequences as “a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar” (“Formulaic Sequences” 465). Istvan Kecskes defines formulaic sequences as “multi-word collocations which are stored and retrieved holistically rather than being generated *do novo* with each use” and are “either more than the sum of the individual parts, or else diverge significantly from a literal, or work-for-word meaning and operate as a single semantic unit” (3). Formulaic sequences include, but are not limited to, language such as idioms, proverbs, multiword metaphors, phrasal verbs and chain based formulas.

Wray offers an easily understandable view of what formulaic sequences are and how they can be used as indivisible phrases. She gives the examples of “*laissez-faire, au fait, sine qua non* and *et cetera*” as being French and Latin phrases that English speakers use but do not understand the individual linguistic components of (Wray, “Formulaic Language” 116). These non-English phrases have only one holistic meaning in their use by native English speakers, but are surely divisible into individual word units by anyone with an understanding of either French or Latin. These non-English phrases are used in the same way as other English derived formulaic sequences, making the point that regardless of the language of origin, word phrases can have one

indivisible meaning. An example of this holistic meaning in English is *put down*. These two words could have their individual meanings in the sentence “Put down that cookie” to literally mean “do not hold on to that cookie any longer.” *Put down* could also have the holistic meaning of “to criticize,” like in the sentence “He was tired of their constant put downs.” This borrowing of phrases from other languages in conjunction with the examples from English demonstrates the language speaker’s active use of formulaic sequences as indivisible units of meaning.

Formulaic sequences have been hypothesized as possibly being the beginning of human language. Wray states that “this raises the interesting possibility that formulaic language might have predated novel grammatical language in human evolution” (“Formulaic Sequences” 485). It is an interesting thought that the foundations of language could have begun with indivisible sound segments or units that carried meaning, and with the passing of time, language became more complicated, more articulate and eventually more analyzed and studied by its users. This hypothesis could lead to the idea that indivisible units of meaning are the more basic forms of language and that the grammatical divisions imposed upon language in modern times is a complicated and artificial secondary manifestation in language. Evidence of this can be seen in the Hmong language which until being brought to the West in the later years of the twentieth century, existed solely as an oral language. Therefore, formulaic sequences could be perceived as, if the above hypothesis is considered, more natural and basic forms of language. This could be part of the reason why there are so many names for and categories of formulaic sequences.

Formulaic sequences have been described in many different ways. In table 1, a list is compiled by Wray of the many names for and ways to describe formulaic sequences. There are forty-seven different terms listed in table 1 for formulaic sequences. Some of these are more than fifty years old and others have been created to describe very specific types of formulaic



sequences. The main point to be taken from this long but not all inclusive list of terminology is that there is a documented history throughout language teaching and literature demonstrating the importance of formulaic sequences in language use and learning.

Table 1 The Many Names for Formulaic Sequences

Amalgams	Formulas/formulae	Lexicalized sentence	Recurring utterances
Automatic	Fossilized forms	Stems	Rote
Chunks	Frozen metaphors	Multiword units	Routine formulae
Clichés	Frozen phrases	Non-compositional	Schemata
Co-ordinate constructions	Gambits	Non-computational	Semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices
Collocations	Gestalt	Non-productive	Sentence builders
Composites	Holistic	Non-propositional	Stable and familiar expressions with specialized subsenses
Conventionalized forms	Holophrases	Petrifications	Stereotyped phrases
F[ixed] E[xpressions] including I[dioms]	Idiomatic	Praxons	Stereotypes
Fixed expressions	Idioms	Preassembled speech prefabricated routines and patterns	Stock utterances
Formulaic language	Irregular	Ready-made expressions	Synthetic unanalyzed chunks of speech
Formulaic speech	Lexical(ized) phrases	Ready-made utterances	

(Wray, "Formulaic Sequences" 465)

## 2.2 Categorizations of Formulaic Sequences

### 2.2.1 Becker's Six Classes

In a 1975 paper entitled “The Phrasal Lexicon,” Joseph D. Becker defines six classes, or categories, for formulaic sequences (see table 2). Class I contains polywords. Polywords are phrases that contain two or more words that are used and understood as single words. This class can include phrasal verbs and euphemisms. Class II is phrasal constraints. These are phrases that have some variability which affect the meaning of the phrase. For example, something can happen “by coincidence,” “by pure coincidence” or “by sheer coincidence” (Becker 61). The addition of *pure* and *sheer* in to the formulaic sequences *by coincidence* changes the intensity and specificity of the meaning of the phrase. The third class is deictic locutions. Class III phrases work “as clauses or whole utterances whose purpose is to direct the course of conversation, i.e. the flow of expectations, emotions, attitudes, etc.” (Becker 61). Examples of deictic locutions are *in fact...* meaning “I believe this to be true” and *don't get me wrong...* meaning “Allow me to explain myself.”

Becker's fourth class for formulaic sequences is sentence builders. Sentence builders “provide the skeleton for the expression of an entire idea” and contain fixed positions for people, places, things, actions, etc. (Becker 61). Becker provides the following example for sentence builders: (person A) gave (person B) a (long) song and dance about (a topic) (61). The meaning of this example being “A tried to convince B of something, and was cynical and perhaps less than truthful about what he said” (Becker 61). Class V phrases are situational utterances. These formulaic sequences are usually complete sentences and are the “right” thing to say in the given situation. Saying “You're welcome” after someone thanks you or having a sales associate at a retail store ask, “Can I help you?” when you're searching the aisles for something are examples

of situational utterances. Class VI, the final class, is verbatim texts. A verbatim text can be any memorized text that is repeated exactly the same way every time it is used. Examples of these would be proverbs, literary quotes, famous sayings, etc. Becker's six classes for formulaic sequences formed a foundation for future researchers' work in the categorization of formulaic sequences.

Table 2 Becker's Six Classes of Formulaic Sequences

Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Class VI
Polywords	Phrasal constraints	Deictic Locutions	Sentence Builders	Situational Utterances	Verbatim Texts
<i>for good and happy hour</i>	<i>by pure coincidence</i>	<i>in fact and don't get me wrong</i>	(person A) gave (person B) a (long) song and dance about (a topic).	Responding to "thank you" with "you're welcome"	"To be or not be" or "Four score and seven years ago..."

### 2.2.2 Wray and Perkins' Functions of Formulaic Sequences

Alison Wray and Michael Perkins, in the 2000 article "The functions of formulaic language: an integrated model," identify three categories where formulaic sequences act as devices for social interaction. First, the manipulation of others focuses on commands ("Keep off the grass"), requests ("Could you repeat that please?"), politeness markers ("I wonder if you don't mind...") and bargains ("I'll give you \_\_\_ for it."). This manipulation of others is for "satisfying physical, emotional and cognitive needs" of the speaker (Wray and Perkins 14). Second, asserting separate identity involves storytelling ("You're never going to believe this, but..."), turn claimers and holders ("Yes, but the thing is...") and personal turns of phrase ("You know what I mean?"). These formulaic sequences offer speakers the opportunity to be "taken

seriously” and to separate themselves from the others around them (Wray and Perkins 14). Third, asserting group identity includes overall membership in a group (singing Happy Birthday or unison recitation in a church or athletic setting) and affirming or adjusting one’s place in hierarchy. Affirming or adjusting one’s place in hierarchy could include threats (“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”), quotation (quoting others in speech), forms of address (“Your Highness”) and hedges (“Well I’m not sure”). The function of these formulaic sequences is for overall group inclusion and the subtle placement and movement of individuals in the hierarchal structure of a group (Wray and Perkins 14). The above formulaic sequences are categorized for the understanding of social interaction, but Wray and Perkins identify others that can be used as fillers to replace awkward pauses and nonnative-sounding runs of words which have been previously identified as markers of nonfluency.

One way Wray and Perkins explain that formulaic sequences can be used to compensate for limitations in language skills is by assisting in processing short-cuts. Knowing the standard phrases (“I have known \_\_\_ for \_\_\_ years) and standard labels for items or ideas (*personal computer; bullet point*) can reduce awkward pauses and nonnative-sounding runs of words. *Time-buyers* are another way to aid speakers in maintaining speech rhythm and can prevent loss of turn in conversation. Four examples of time-buyers are: fillers (“If you want my opinion...”); turn holders (“And another thing...”); discourse shape markers (“There are three points I want to make. Firstly...Secondly...Thirdly...”); and repeating the preceding input to provide time to think of a response (Wray and Perkins 16). The above categories are illustrated in table 3.

Table 3 Wray and Perkins' Categories of Formulaic Sequences

<b>Function</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Types</b>
Manipulation of others	Satisfying physical, emotional and cognitive needs	Commands, requests, politeness markers, bargains
Asserting separate identity	Being taken seriously and to separate from the crowd	Story-telling, turn claimers and holders, personal turns of phrase
Asserting group identity	Overall membership and place in hierarchy	Group chants, institutionalized forms of words, ritual and threats, quotation, forms of address, hedges
Processing short-cuts	Increased production speed and/or fluency	Standard phrases (with or without gaps) and standard ideational labels with agreed meanings
Time-buyers	Vehicles for fluency, rhythm and emphasis and planning time without losing the turn	Standard phrases with simple meanings, fillers, turn-holders, discourse shape markers, repetitions of preceding input

(Wray and Perkins 14, 16)

Another function of formulaic sequences not mentioned by Wray and Perkins is that of necessary topics. James R. Nattinger and Jeanette S. DeCarrico define necessary topics as “topics about which learners will be asked, or ones they will need to talk about frequently” (123). At the top of this list are autobiography (“My name is \_\_\_\_\_”; “I’m from \_\_\_\_\_”; “I’m \_\_\_\_\_ years old”), language (“Do you speak \_\_\_\_\_?”; “How do you say/spell \_\_\_\_\_?”, “I speak a little \_\_\_\_\_?”) and quantity (“How much/big is \_\_\_\_\_?”; “Lots of \_\_\_\_\_”). These may be some of the more fundamental and beginner formulaic sequences, but they are very common and some of the most frequently used by both native and nonnative English speakers. Next are sequences about

time (“When is \_\_\_\_\_?”; “for a long time”; “the \_\_\_\_\_ before/after \_\_\_\_\_”), location (“to the right/left”; “across from”; “How far is \_\_\_\_\_?”) and weather (“Is it going to be \_\_\_\_\_?”; “It’s very \_\_\_\_\_ today.”). These necessary topics are more about gaining information or being part of the group. They could also be seen as conversation starters or small talk topics. The last group focuses on public and/or group dynamics. These are likes (“I’d like to \_\_\_\_\_”; “\_\_\_\_\_ is a lot of fun”; “I like \_\_\_\_\_ a lot”; “I don’t like \_\_\_\_\_ at all”), food (“a table for \_\_\_\_\_, please”; “I’ll have \_\_\_\_\_”; “Check please”) and shopping (“It’s too expensive”; “a really good/bad buy/bargain”; “I want to buy/see \_\_\_\_\_”) (Nattinger and DeCarrico 123-4). These necessary topics provide formulaic sequences that address everyday practical language needs. The above functions present a framework for categorizing formulaic sequences, but do not necessarily address how these categories of formulaic sequences relate to each other.

### **2.2.3 Kecskes’ Formulaic Continuum**

Kecskes uses a formulaic continuum to categorize formulaic sequences. In this formulaic continuum (as seen in table 4), the more grammatically bound formulaic sequences are on the left and the more semantically bound sequences are on the right (Kecskes 3). The grammatically bound sequences on the left are often described or explained with “that’s just how we say it” without having a particular reason why these specific words are used in this specific order. As the formulaic sequences progress to the right of the continuum, they begin to take on situational or metaphorical meaning. This formulaic continuum can assist L2 learners by offering an explanation by way of categorization for why the more grammatical formulaic sequences are the way they are and by showing the difference between speech formulas, situation-bound utterances and idioms.

Basically, formulaic sequences can be better understood by L2 learners when they recognize that some are grammatically patterned and others are semantically patterned. For example, grammatical units, fixed semantic units and phrasal verbs focus on the order of and which function words (articles, prepositions etc.) are used in a formulaic sequence; whereas the semantically patterned formulaic sequences focus more so on the holistic meaning of the phrase. Most native English speakers would get *in* a car and *on* an airplane. There is no good reason for this, it's grammatical. On the other hand, an idiom like "It's raining cats and dogs" has meaning based on the whole phrase regardless of function words. Specific examples of each category in the continuum are presented in table 4. This formulaic continuum clearly identifies the subtle shades of function and meaning within formulaic sequences as a whole.

Table 4 Kecskes' Formulaic Continuum

<b>Grammatical Units</b>	<b>Fixed Semantic Units</b>	<b>Phrasal Verbs</b>	<b>Speech Formulas</b>	<b>Situation-bound Utterances</b>	<b>Idioms</b>
<i>be going to</i>	<i>as a matter of fact</i>	<i>put up with</i>	<i>going shopping</i>	<i>welcome aboard</i>	<i>kick the bucket</i>
<i>have to</i>	<i>Suffice it to say</i>	<i>get along with</i>	<i>not bad</i>	<i>help yourself</i>	<i>spill the beans</i>

(Kecskes 3)

#### 2.2.4 Summary of 2.1 and 2.2

The above three samples from Becker, Wray and Perkins and Kecskes are excellent examples of the many ways formulaic sequences are categorized. Becker's six classes divide formulaic sequences into individual classes without explaining connections between the classes

or diversity within the classes. Wray and Perkins get very specific in categorizing the functions, effects and types of formulaic sequences. Their categories are very specific but lack the freedom of overlap and connection between groups. And Kecskes explains the grammatical and semantic differences between formulaic sequences, but lacks the specificity of the larger family of formulaic sequences. The combination of these three types of systems would make the ideal system. The problem with this is that there are too many subtleties and grades of formulaic sequences to produce an effective, all inclusive model. As an initial and broad survey of attempts at the categorization of formulaic sequences, these three systems cover the general categorical scope of formulaic sequences. Therefore in this paper, with the above terminology and previously discussed descriptions in mind, the term formulaic sequence will be used to refer to two or more words used as a phrase or as a ready-made grammatical construction that is understood with one holistic meaning or purpose.

## **2.3 The Significance of Formulaic Sequences in Oral Fluency**

### **2.3.1 Social Interaction and Formulaic Sequences**

Kecskes identifies three reasons why formulaic sequences are important to fluent oral communication. First, formulas decrease the speaker's effort in communication. Kecskes states that "formulaic expressions ease the processing overload not only because they are 'ready-made' and do not require the speaker/hearer any 'putting together' but also because their salient meanings are easily accessible in online production and processing" (5). In other words, formulaic sequences increase the economy of communication. This is important to fluent communication because, as previously stated, long pauses, nonlexical fillers and other breaks in fluid communication production can hinder an L2 learner's communication. Second, formulaic sequences frame the intent of the communication. This means that formulaic sequences can and



often do elicit specific responses. For example, at a carnival or fair when attendants at Midway games say “Step right up and win a prize,” this does not literally mean walking up to them will win a prize, but it is an invitation to try to win a prize by playing the game. This “framing” action of formulaic sequences is common in everyday communication (Kecskes 5). This makes formulaic sequences necessary to convey quick and accurate information in everyday conversation.

Third, formulaic sequences provide a shared and common experience between communicators (Kecskes 6). The act of giving directions is an example of this. In the upper Midwest of the United States, it is common to give directions by saying “take a” followed by “left” or “right.” On the East Coast of the U.S., it is more common to say “make a” followed by “left” or “right.” Although this is a minor change and is easily understood by most speakers of English, the change of that one sound (/t/ or /m/) can increase the effort and economy in the processing of the hearer while possibly interfering with the listener’s response time. Formulaic sequences can help reduce signs of nonfluency by providing a shared and common experience between communicators. In addition to the above three reasons, Wray identifies three more significant social interaction functions of formulaic sequences in oral communication.

In the 1998 article “Protolanguage as a holistic system for social interaction,” Wray identifies that “the successful manipulation of others; group membership and identity; [and] fluency and holding the turn” are three basic functional social interaction categories of formulaic sequences (60). An example of how L2 learners would use formulaic sequences to successfully manipulate others can be seen by the use of a phrase book in the target language (Wray, “Protolanguage” 61). The express purpose of this phrase book is to allow L2 learner to select specific phrases or utterances that will elicit a specific response based on the translation of their

L1 desire into the L2 phrase. Phrase books usually have the most universal and specific phrases (formulaic sequences) for the conveying and receiving of information, which can make the manipulation of the L2 easier. At a more advanced level, the use of formulaic sequences for manipulation becomes more of an issue of what utterance is most effective rather than the actual meaning of the message (Wray, “Protolanguage” 60). For example, the use of the nonformulaic utterance “May I pass, please?” compared to formulaic sequence “excuse me” to move quickly through a crowded hall or room most likely will bring forth different responses. In my opinion, both of these manipulative utterances will ultimately gain the same result. The only difference being that a person using “excuse me” will bring unquestioned movement; whereas a person using “May I pass, please?” may receive a quizzical look or an “eh” before the movement occurs. The important point here is that formulaic sequences assist in quick and efficient communication.

Next, there are two aspects to group membership. First, there are grammatical formulas versus formulaic sequences for conveying information. Grammatical formulas are any expression of ideas that are grammatically correct and formulaic sequences have all ready been defined (Wray, “Protolanguage” 61). This difference between these two is best explained by the following examples presented by Wray:

1. The Captain has just illuminated the seat belt sign, as an indication that landing is imminent.
2. The Captain’s put on the seatbelt sign, which means we’re about to land. (61)

These two examples show how the spoken language of a Dutch air stewardess in (1) is perfectly grammatical and understandable, but could be considered unconventionally formulated. Whereas in (2), the more natively or fluently formed utterance, there is the use of formulas such as *put on*,

*which means and about to land* in place of *just illuminated, as an indication and landing is imminent*. This may seem trivial because both utterances are completely understandable, but what is important here is that the lack of use of formulaic sequences in oral communication can lead to higher interactional demands on listeners which can in turn create social divides between individuals or groups of people. Wray states that “language [use] demand[s] not novelty, but rather an appropriate combination of formulas, clichés, allusions, slogans and so forth” (“Protolanguage” 62).

The second aspect of group membership has to do with maintaining relationships. Easily recognizable formulaic sequences used for greetings or buying time during an utterance, for instance, are often idiomatic to the specific group individuals belong to. Wray explains how this use of formulaic sequences has more to do with maintaining group identity than for conveying information (“Protolanguage” 62). One way to look at this would be to consider how any specific group of friends communicates with each other. There are most likely idiomatic formulaic sequences for that group when they talk about sports, school, work, other friends etc. These groups could be as small as just two or three friends or as big as a university campus or place of employment. This focuses the idea that formulaic sequences are integral in group membership for both acceptance in the group and participating in the group.

The third and final functional social interaction category of formulaic sequences presented by Wray is fluency and holding the turn. Here, many different formulaic sequences need to be memorized for the purpose of being able to quickly join into, respond to and/or maintain a conversation. The objective is to be able to respond to another or maintain a conversation without having to think about what the response is going to be or how to keep one’s turn while the next point is being formulated. It is not always possible or practical to construct a

unique utterance in the flow of a conversation or in the quick passing of information (Wray, “Protolanguage” 62). Wray points out that often times when formulaic sequences are not available as readily accessible units of speech, the L2 speaker can just agree with a nod of the head or with an “okay” for lack of a quick response. The L2 speaker might not complete a thought or idea because of a pause that causes a loss of turn in a conversation due to not having a formulaic sequence on hand. This can lead to misunderstandings and possibly partial or even false information being conveyed inadvertently because of the lack of instant access to formulaic sequences (Wray, “Protolanguage” 63). An example of these kinds of situations could be nonnative English speakers losing their turns in group conversations by not being equipped with common formulaic sequences like “In addition to...”, “and I’d like to add...” or “because of this I think...” that can let the others in a conversation know that the speaker has more to say. Trying to form a unique phrase in the moment could lead to a loss of turn in the conversation or an awkward break in the flow of the conversation. L2 learners who are made aware of the use of formulaic sequences in group conversation will have a better opportunity to maintain and participate in conversations.

### **2.3.2 Processing Formulaic Sequences**

In the article “Formulaic Sequences: Are They Processed More Quickly than Nonformulaic Language by Native and Nonnative Speakers?” by Kathy Conklin and Norbert Schmitt, Conklin and Schmitt first tested idioms with cloze tests (a form of fill in the blank) to ensure the idioms being tested were well known to native speakers. Next, using the selected idioms, they created different passages that used the idioms in three ways. First, the idioms were written in context as the nonliteral idiomatic meaning; next, as the literal meaning; and lastly, as a control meaning (Conklin and Schmitt 9-10). For example, “hit the nail on the head” as the

nonliteral idiomatic meaning means “to get it correct”; as the literal meaning it means “to physically hit a nail squarely”; and the control meaning is using the same words and syllables as best as possible to convey a different meaning than the other two. An example of this would be “hit his head on the nail” (Conklin and Schmitt 10). The passages were followed by comprehension questions that the participants answered.

There were two different groups that participated in this study, a native English speaking group and a nonnative English speaking group. The participants were all paid for their participation and were given a bonus if they were able to complete all of the questions within the time limit (Conklin and Schmitt 11). In other words, the participants could take their time with the passages and comprehension questions, but they were encouraged to do it quickly. The results of this study showed that both the idiomatic and literal versions of the formulaic sequences were read more quickly than the control phrases by both groups. Although the native speakers had quicker reading times than the nonnative speakers, both groups read the nonliteral formulaic sequences the quickest with the literal formulaic sequences a close second and the control phrases a distant third (Conklin and Schmitt 12). One of the main conclusions made by the authors of this research is that formulaic sequences “are NOT more difficult to understand than literal speech” (Conklin and Schmitt 15). This study demonstrates that the mental processing of formulaic sequences is quicker or better yet more efficient than that of nonformulaic language. Though this research was conducted using reading skills and not oral skills, it is conceivable that the mental processing of language could very well be similar for both reading and speaking. This is only one selection of a larger body of language processing research, but for the purposes of this paper, this research combined with the explanations above

gives a strong example that formulaic sequences can make processing language easier which could lead to greater oral fluency.

### 2.3.3 Formulaic Sequences in Corpus Research

According to Conklin and Schmitt's research, 28-59% of L1 speech is formulaic (3). The research of Wray and Perkins states up to 70% of adult native language could be considered formulaic (1-2). When using the definition of formulaic sequences presented in Section 2.1, these percentages could be considered pretty high and need to be justified. In the field of Corpus Linguistics, the frequency of formulaic sequences in the English language has been studied in detail and shown some interesting results that could verify the above percentages. First, a brief description of what Corpus Linguistics is will be presented. According to Daniel Krieger's article in *The Internet TESL Journal*, Corpus Linguistics is as follows:

In order to conduct a study of language which is corpus-based, it is necessary to gain access to a corpus and a concordancing program. A corpus consists of a databank of natural texts, compiled from writing and/or a transcription of recorded speech. A concordancer is a software program which analyzes corpora and lists the results. The main focus of corpus linguistics is to discover patterns of authentic language use through analysis of actual usage. The aim of a corpus based analysis is [to]...account for the probable choices that speakers actually make. Corpus linguistics' only concern is the usage patterns of the empirical data and what that reveals to us about language behavior.

Using this description, a closer look at how Corpus Linguistics has helped identify and determine the frequency of formulaic sequences will be discussed below.

Rita Simpson-Vlach and Nick C. Ellis, in the article "An Academic Formulas List: New Method in Phraseology Research," state that "more collocations [formulaic sequences] are found

in spoken language” than in writing and this is because “[s]peech is constructed in real time and this imposes greater working memory demands than writing, hence the greater the need to rely on formulas” (488). This statement corroborates the previously discussed processing research, but not all of the formulaic sequences derived from corpora data are practical for the purposes of teaching. Simpson-Vlach and Ellis explain that a close look at the corpora data is needed to determine which sequences are important to teach and which ones are not. For example, “and of the” and “on the other hand” do not carry the same significance as formulaic sequences. The sequence “and of the” happens very frequently in the corpora but does not necessarily have a significant meaning in and of itself; whereas, “on the other hand” has a very specific meaning as a formulaic sequence (Simpson-Vlach and Ellis 490). It is reasonable to say that “and of the” is a frequently occurring sequence in the English language because those three words are three of the most used words in the English language. They are a sequence that a computer can identify, but do not carry a holistic meaning because they are just a string of function words. This research by Simpson-Vlach and Ellis takes the usage and meaning of formulaic sequences into consideration. For this reason, they have created a formula for identifying formulaic sequences from corpora data that have holistic meaning and are most important for teaching purposes.

Simpson-Vlach and Ellis used multiple corpora of approximately three million words of both academic and nonacademic transcribed speech samples to create their list of formulaic sequences. The data that they chose to look at consisted of 3, 4 and 5 word phrases from the corpora. They excluded 2 word phrases because of their frequency in an attempt to keep the list at a manageable size. Next, they chose only phrases that recurred 10 or more times per million words. Simpson-Vlach and Ellis then used a system to sort out the most common nonformulaic sequences in the corpora (“and of the”) from the most meaningful sequences (“on the other

hand”). The unfiltered list from the corpora consisted of over 14,000 phrases, which was filtered down to 2000 items by removing repetitions and keeping the more statistically frequent phrases from the corpora on the list and then the list was filtered down to approximately 200 phrases (Simpson-Vlach and Ellis 491-4). Simpson-Vlach and Ellis then divide the 200 or so formulaic sequences into functional categories consisting of three groups each with multiple subcategories (498-502). These functional categories groups are similar to the ones discussed throughout Section 2.2 and will not be discussed in detail here. Nevertheless, over 200 semantically relevant formulaic sequences were found to occur more than ten times per million words in these transcribed speech samples. This shows that formulaic sequences are consistently used in fluent/native English oral communication.

Michael Stubbs offers different approaches to identifying and teaching formulaic sequences in spoken English. One example Stubbs gives for illustrating formulaic sequences is by using one content word, or nongrammatical word, that occurs in many different sequences. Stubbs uses the verb *implement* as an example. It “occurs over 1,900 times” in the corpus he refers to, but most frequently in combination with “plan, reform(s) policy/ies, measures, changes, programme, recommendations, resolutions, agreement, proposals, scheme” (Stubbs 218). Another example he gives is with the noun *eye*. It occurred frequently with *keep*, *caught*, *public*, *blind* and *private* (Stubbs 221). Though most of these are two word sequences, this system of using one root word with the formulaic sequences around it could be a very effective way of presenting some commonly used expressions. Words that are known to the student could easily be matched with the many possible formulaic sequences that surround that specific word. The preposition *up* could be used as an example. *Up* occurs in all of the following combinations: *pick*



*up, cheer up, put up with, stand up to, shut-up and laugh it up.* Stubbs goes beyond the two or three word sequences and terms the longer sequences with grammatical words in them chains.

Stubbs describes *chains* as “one type of repeated event” in language use (230). Chains have patterns of grammatical words where the content words in the sequence can be different. An example of this is the structure PREP [preposition] *the* NOUN *of the*. Stubbs cites that five of the top ten chains from the corpus he used and thirteen of the top forty-five chains have this structure (232). Following is a sample of his top thirteen chains:

- by the end of the
- in the middle of the
- on the edge of the
- at the bottom of the
- in the case of the
- towards the end of the
- on the part of the
- at the time of the

(Stubbs 232)

For a more extensive list of Stubbs’ chains, see Appendix A. Stubbs identifies that in the list above not only do the chains repeat a syntactic pattern but they also follow a semantic pattern. The nouns that follow the PREP *the* NOUN *of the* pattern tend to be “terms for place or time, and some can be used both for physical places and time periods” (Stubbs 232). Examples are “towards the end of the book/day” or “in the middle of the bus/night.” Using the PREP *the* NOUN *of the* followed by a noun that is a place or time could be a beneficial way to group formulaic sequences into an easily digestible and retainable system for students.

The implications for using chains to teach formulaic sequences are significant. Firstly, chains are very common in daily conversation. Identifying those formulaic sequences that are most common in fluent oral communication will most certainly aid in the development of oral fluency in L2 learners. Secondly, these chains are versatile. Idioms and other kinds of formulaic

sequences often offer chunks of language with a concrete meaning that can be used by L2 learners in specific situations or circumstances, but chains offer a formula that is more flexible to the everyday use of the target language of the L2 learners. As described in the example above, both time and place can be used in a variety of combinations in the PREP *the* NOUN *of the* chain. Lastly, L2 learners can apply chains in their daily use of the target language because of how common they are and the variety of ways to use them. This combination of commonality and variety make chains a valuable tool for improving oral fluency skills with formulaic sequences.

#### **2.3.4 Summary of 2.3**

Formulaic sequences have a very important place in oral fluency. They ease and streamline the processing of language as well as assist speakers in expressing their needs and desires. They provide nonnative speakers with easily recognizable grammatical forms and ways to maintain their place in conversations without leaving them in positions of not being able to fully express themselves. Formulaic sequences also make up much of native spoken language. Corpus research shows that thousands of formulaic sequences exist in samples of native speech and many of them are repetitive or consist of formulas themselves. The need to narrow down and specify which sequences are most valuable to learners may be more challenging than actually teaching them. This demonstrates that formulaic sequences have an important role in both the interaction and composition of the spoken language.

## SECTION 3: SPEECH COMMUNITIES

### 3.1 Speech Community and Formulaic Sequences

The speech community is very important for English language learners. Dell Hymes discusses the speech community in detail in the book *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*. Hymes separates language from the speech community by explaining that each community or group of people using a specific language could very well use the language differently. For example, collocations, irony and idioms can carry differing meaning depending on the community they are spoken in. Likewise, the volume the language is spoken at along with the duration of pauses speakers take can vary greatly depending on the speech community. Furthermore, greeting styles and acceptable and unacceptable topics can be unknown or misunderstood without the knowledge of the speech community where these utterances are taking place. If language was just grammatical knowledge, then any utterance in any given language would be easily understood and accepted by all speakers of that language; this is just not the case (Hymes 47-50). For example, if someone said “How are you going today?” instead of “How’s it goin’?” as a greeting, it would be grammatically correct, but would most likely not fit into any native English speaking speech community. For another example, there is little difference in meaning between saying “You may be seated” and “Have a seat.” The difference lies in that the latter is missing a subject and is very informal and casual while the former is very proper and polite. These subtle differences, often times not recognized by participants of a speech community, are the oral fluency markers or phrases and sayings (formulaic sequences) that make up speech communities. With these in mind, Hymes defines a speech community as “a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech” (51).

Wray adds to the concept of the speech community by stating “that any speech community, or complex of speech communities, establishes a set of idiomatic ways of expressing ideas, by favoring, purely through repeated use, certain complete phrases and a great many partly filled phrase-frames” (“Formulaic Language” 117). Therefore, each speech community expects to hear its own unique (or partially shared) way of using a language. One of the reasons speech communities have these established expectations is for ease of language processing (Wray, “Formulaic Language” 117-8). For example, if someone from the southeastern United States walked into a pub in Boston, MA and said “How y’all doin’?” to the bartender, it might elicit an examining look and questioning response due to the lack of regularity of such a phrase in the northeastern United States. This unfamiliarity or lack of regularity with differing formulaic sequences in a given speech community can greatly impact language learners using a second language. Without the knowledge of these speech community idiosyncrasies, it might not only be difficult to be understood, but it could also make communication frustrating and/or uncomfortable. It is important then to better understand speech communities in greater detail to best apply formulaic sequences for the improvement of oral fluency.

There are several different facets of the speech community, but only the most important of them will be discussed here. First, the speech situation is an important facet because it is the understanding of when and in what context specific utterances are used within the given speech community (Hymes 51-2). Examples of this would include when or when not to talk (either to a classmate or the teacher) during a class. This could also include which topics are appropriate for a baseball game or being out with friends. In a classroom setting, more formal formulaic sequences might be used and at a baseball game more slang. There are many components of speech that are important to the language learner and message form and message content are

crucial in conveying information accurately (Hymes 53-5). The form of the message is important because it relays the level of formality, the importance and/or word choice of an utterance. A softly spoken polite request has a very different form than slang shouted across a room. Some speech communities might say “Make a left” and others might say “Take a left.” Neither is technically incorrect or better than the other, but depending on the speech community, one of the two is generally used over the other. The content of a message could have as much to do with the meaning of the utterance as it could with how the utterance is employed within the speech community. Some communities might use “get out” idiomatically to mean “I don’t believe you” and another community may only use it to mean “leave the premises.” Without an understanding of the function of form and content in a given speech community, it could be difficult for a nonnative speaker to understand the messages being received or to be understood or accepted when conveying a message. Either of these outcomes could lead to frustration by the L2 speaker or a lack of acceptance of the L2 speaker in the community.

The setting and scene play an important role in what kind of and how speech is conveyed. The speaker, addressor, hearer/audience and addressee are all interrelated and interdependent for speech to be understood. In an academic setting where there may be many people from very different speech communities, it could be difficult to immediately find common ground. But, if these individuals spend extended time together, most likely one speech community will become the dominate speech community. A college or university campus is an example of this. Students or faculty from speech communities outside of the college or university generally assimilate or acquire the formulaic sequences used in the new location. Purpose: outcomes and goals refer to what speakers want to get out of their communication (Hymes 55-7). If the speaker does not understand the speech community with its functions and expectations, the desired result of

communication may not be reached. A speech community that uses a high volume of collocations or slang could cause comprehension issues for anyone outside of that speech community. For this reason, the study of formulaic sequences used in specific speech communities by L2 learners who will be communicating in those communities will aid the L2 learners' oral fluency acclimation in said communities.

Hymes continues by explaining that the way in which the utterance is presented is considered the key. This includes the expressiveness and style used in an utterance. There are some speech communities that use very colorful metaphors and others that have simply created their own sayings and formulaic sequences unique to their communities. Norms of interaction and norms of interpretation detail how individuals in a given speech community expect to be spoken to and how they will most likely receive what is communicated to them (Hymes 57-61). A new student addressing a professor that he or she has never met before by saying "S'up dude?" will in most every case be received by the professor negatively. Although this example may not be the case for nonnative English speaking students, it is important for English language learners to understand the proper time and place for different formulaic sequences. As can be seen in the above evidence, language learners have more to learn than just idioms, metaphors and other formulaic sequences. Determining how and where to use formulaic sequences is an important step for all language learners, because one's oral fluency is influenced by the understanding of speech communities and the specific use of formulaic sequences therein. Therefore, a curriculum involving formulaic sequences must address speech communities to a greater or lesser degree depending on the intent of the instruction. Although there are many plausible speech communities to discuss for L2 learners, the primary speech community for discussion here will be that of the academic environment.

### 3.2 Academic Speech Communities

In the article “The Third Language of Academic English,” Jeff Zwiers defines academic language as “the set of words and phrases that (1) describe content-area knowledge and procedures, (2) express complex thinking processes and abstract concepts, and (3) create cohesion and clarity in written and oral discourse” (60). The various disciplines and instructors in academic settings have their own unique formulaic sequences. It would be next to impossible to try and teach all of these specific sequences for each discipline to every L2 learner desiring to study at an English speaking institution. For this reason, Zwiers has developed five learning habits, or strategies, to assist L2 learners in their academic English skills. First, Zwiers recommends “using context to interpret meaning” meaning that “[w]hen listening to spoken academic language, students can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by paying attention to the speaker’s purpose, intonation, and facial expressions, as well as to key words the speaker emphasizes or repeats” (60). For more advanced L2 learners, this would mean identifying those formulaic sequences that are most often used in their given disciplines and by each of their instructors. This could be accomplished by watching or listening to lectures in the discipline in an effort to identify frequently used formulaic sequences before ever entering the classroom. An L2 student who has been exposed to these phrases will most likely have an easier time conveying and receiving oral communication.

Next, Zwiers states that it is important to be aware of the vocabulary that describes thinking skills. He uses examples of formulaic sequences such as “on the other hand” and “doesn’t hold water” for this and suggests that when students identify these sequences, they should compile them for later reference and study (Zwiers 61). These formulaic sequences are not specifically academic in nature and do not necessarily belong to any specific academic

discipline, but are frequently used to describe academic information. The next learning habit is extensive reading of challenging but not overly difficult academic materials. These could be book reviews, magazines, introductory information on a topic, etc. Extensive reading allows students the opportunity to go back and review phrases that they do not understand at first (Zwiers 61-2). This habit could involve underlining unfamiliar phrases in the materials being reviewed and cross referencing them with each other to find patterns and repetitive sequences and ideas. This habit is similar to the listening strategy above, just with the written word in place of the spoken word.

The final two strategies are to “take risks with the new language” and “converse with native speakers about academic topics” (Zwiers 62). In both of these strategies, students should try to actively use any academic language they have identified. The more target sequences are used the more automated they become. Students should not concern themselves with correctness at this point because often times, if there are errors grammatically or semantically with their utterances, the response they receive will model the correct use of what was said incorrectly (Zwiers 62). These last two strategies are the most difficult of the five for language learners to implement. Most language learners do not want to make mistakes because then they feel embarrassed or inadequate. Zwiers emphasizes throughout this article that instructor and native speaker feedback and/or modeling is one of the best ways to learn Academic English. Zwiers states that “[i]f students remain silent, never communicating their thoughts, they will not hear direct responses to their comments” and therefore not learn the specific academic language they need to be able to apply to their communication and class work (62). Zwiers, with Marie Crawford, address the issue of having conversations and expressing thoughts and opinions in the following research.



Zwiers and Crawford identify that much of the conversation that takes place in ESL classrooms is mostly superficial and very limited in duration and scope (70). Therefore, they have developed six of what they believe to be “the most useful and teachable features” for conversation (Zwiers and Crawford 71). These six features are “initiating a worthwhile topic, elaborating and clarifying, supporting one’s ideas, building on or challenging another’s ideas, applying ideas to life, and paraphrasing/summarizing” and were used primarily in pair work in the classroom (Zwiers and Crawford 71). Examples of these six features, including formulaic sequences to apply to each feature, are listed in table 5. In table 5, formulaic sequences are referred to as “prompts.” The examples in the two columns on the right of the table offer formulaic sequences to be used with the Features of Conversations on the left of the table. Helping students consciously connect conversational features with formulaic sequences can aid L2 learners in their oral fluency as is evidenced by the results of Zwiers and Crawford work.

The results of the implementation of these six features in the classroom are as follows. Student conversations became more applicable to the subject matter. Conversations were longer with more academic vocabulary to communicate ideas and consisted of less story retelling and more independent thought. Class conversations also improved, which was evidenced by less instructor mediated comments and more student controlled conversation (Zwiers and Crawford 73). The application of formulaic sequences into L2 students’ conversation improved their oral fluency according to this research. Helping students identify where formulaic sequences fit into conversations helps students express themselves and carry on more meaningful conversations. This research demonstrates that when students understand where and when to use the formulaic sequences that they are equipped with, the communication of ideas and subject matter is more unique and fluent.

Table 5 Academic Conversation Features

<b>Features of Conversations</b>	<b>Prompts for Using the Feature</b>	<b>Prompts for Responding</b>
Come up with a worthy topic	Why do you think the author wrote this? What are some themes that emerged in...?	I think the author wrote it to teach us about... One theme might be...
Elaborate and clarify	Can you elaborate? What do you mean by...? Can you tell me more about...? What makes you think that?	I think it means that... In other words...
Support ideas with examples	Can you give an example? Can you show me where it says that? Can you be more specific? Are there any cases of that?	For example... In the text it said that... One case showed that...
Build on or challenge another's idea	What do you think? Can you add to this idea? Do you agree? What might be other points of view?	I would add that... Then again, I think that... I want to expand on your point about...
Apply/Connect	So how can we apply this idea to our lives? What can we learn from this character/part/story? If you were...	In my life... I think it can teach us... If I were..., I would have...
Paraphrase and summarize	What have we discussed so far? How should we summarize what we talked about?	We can say that... The main theme/point of the text seems to be...

(Zwiers and Crawford 71)

### 3.3 Summary of Section 3

The speech community has a great impact on the use of formulaic sequences. What formulaic sequences are spoken, how they are spoken and why they are spoken are all determined to a greater or lesser degree by the speech community in which they are spoken. Without an understanding of what speech communities L2 learners most likely will be entering (be it academic, vocational, social, etc.), it would be very difficult to pick the best formulaic sequences to teach. As has been explained, each speech community has its own set of formulaic sequences and must be addressed as an individual speech community. The research for speech communities indicates that L2 learners planning on studying in an English speaking educational system will need at least some instruction in the formulaic sequences of the speech community they will be entering and an awareness of or the ability to recognize the academic formulaic sequences they may encounter.

## SECTION 4: UNIT PLAN

### 4.1 Teaching Environment

This Unit Plan is for the typical ESL/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. The lessons within the Unit Plan contain instruction and exercises focused on teaching formulaic sequences for improving oral fluency. These lessons are intended for a class solely focusing on oral communication, but they could be modified to fit into a class that teaches other discipline (reading, writing, listening) as well. This Unit Plan is intended for any classroom or group teaching situation where lessons for pairs and/or groups for English language learners are appropriate. The learners will need to collaborate and discuss the exercises in these lessons with other nonnative English learners to fully practice and internalize the intended formulaic sequences in each exercise. In the pair and group environment, students will have the opportunity to work together to figure out the best solutions to the exercises while developing their oral fluency with the use of formulaic sequences. Also, it is important for the students to recognize the utility of formulaic sequences in their oral communication by working through the exercises with each other. When using the formulaic sequences in the lessons with the awareness raising exercises, it should make it clear to the students how formulaic sequences can improve their oral fluency. The exercises presented in these lessons could be adapted to other teaching or tutoring environments, but in this paper, they will be formatted for whole class, pair and/or group work.

The presence of a native English speaker or a fluent nonnative English speaker is also integral to these lessons. The main reason for this is due to the nuanced nature of formulaic sequences, especially idioms. Since the use of formulaic sequences in oral communication is very creative and fluid, the vast possibilities that could potentially arise as questions by the students will solicit the need for fluent English speakers. Fluent English speakers would know if

an utterance or use of a sequence “sounded” right or if it was being used naturally. It would not be possible to create a definitive list of answers for each activity, nor could all of the possible choices or directions for any given topic be fully expressed in written form. Only instructors fluent in the target language would be able to guide students and give them feedback that was naturally formed. It is important to remember that the primary goal of these lessons is to assist L2 learners with identifying and learning formulaic sequences to improve their oral communication fluency. So, the instructors of these lessons whether in an ESL or EFL environment need to have a strong grasp of formulaic sequences in English.

Another important aspect for these lessons is: where are the students going to use the English they are learning? This is where the speech community and speech situation come into relevance. If students are going to be taking their English skills to London, England, then formulaic sequences should be geared toward British English. If the Pacific Northwest in America is the destination, then that speech community should be accounted for. On the other hand, if the students are studying English to attend an English speaking engineering school, then the appropriate formulaic sequences for that academic situation should be applied. The main point here is that not only would it be next to impossible to answer every possible student question before it is asked as stated above, it would be just as difficult to select the best formulaic sequences for each individual teaching environment. Because of this, those who desire to apply these lessons in this Unit Plan to their own unique teaching environment need to choose formulaic sequences for their classes that fit the speech community and purposes of their learners. Therefore, the formulaic sequences used in these lessons are for demonstration purposes only and are not intended as specific curriculum.

## **4.2 Target Students**

This Unit Plan is intended for adult upper intermediate and advanced English language learners who desire to study, work and/or live in an English speaking country. Students who are learning English out of curriculum necessity or as a curiosity may not have the desire or the skill to delve into formulaic sequences. The lessons that follow will require students to already have a strong understanding of phonetics, syntax and semantics in English. The students do not need to be highly experienced speakers of English, but they do need to be able to pronounce English and be able to comprehend the more complex syntactic and semantic functions of the language. Without an understanding of these complexities, students would most likely not be able to automate the formulaic sequences because the inherent structure and meaning of the formulaic sequences could become a point of contention and this would interfere with the developing of fluency. If the students need to focus on the pronunciation of words, verb tenses or word meanings, the full application of formulaic sequences for oral fluency could be lost. When using Rivers' descriptions of the two levels of language behavior useful for developing fluent communication in Section 1, the following lessons focus more on the level of expression of personal meaning than on the level of manipulation. More advanced language learners would hopefully have the experience and understanding to recognize the need to identify and learn formulaic sequences as holistic units of semantically formed speech and not as individual words connected grammatically.

## **4.3 Overview of Lessons**

Lesson 1 is an introduction to formulaic sequences. This lesson will define and provide examples of the various types of formulaic sequences. It will take advantage of the tables in Section 2 by explaining the variety and nuance inherent in the vast array of formulaic sequences.

This lesson will also afford students the opportunity to examine different types and categorizations of formulaic sequences and then ask questions about them for clarification and greater understanding. Students will also be given in class time to discover and use a variety of formulaic sequences in group work to not only practice speaking skills, but to also gain some experience and develop familiarity with formulaic sequences. Lesson 1 will lay the introductory foundation of formulaic sequences for the lessons to follow.

Lesson 2 focuses on the Academic Conversation Features of Zwiers and Crawford presented in Section 3.2. These features provide a framework for understanding and participating in an academic conversation. The first column describes the six stages of conversation by outlining the beginning, middle and end markers in conversation. The next two columns contain prompts (formulaic sequences) for initiating and responding to the features in the first column. This lesson will explain the basic structure of academic conversation and provide formulaic sequences that begin, maintain and summarize such conversation. During this lesson, participants will work in pairs and actively practice and participate in oral conversations relevant to their English language learning.

Lesson 3 is a simulation. Simulations are when “the learners are assigned roles that justify their communication” (Golebiowska 5). In Lesson 3, students will play the part of either a student or a teacher and use formulaic sequences appropriate to the classroom to practice oral fluency. The classroom was chosen as the setting for this lesson because it is a familiar setting for the students and will offer practice that the students can use immediately. Eight of the top “chains” discussed earlier from Stubbs will be used in this lesson. The reason why these chains were chosen is twofold. First, these chains use prepositions idiomatically. Often times, as discussed in Section 1, unfamiliar strings of words by nonnative speakers can create a perception

of nonfluency by native speakers of the language. Practicing some of these idiomatic and normalized uses of prepositions can help reduce these nonfluent sounding phrases. Second, teaching students about chains can raise their awareness of the variety of formulaic language that exists. Idioms and metaphors are often discussed, but other common formulaic sequences, like chains, connect, smooth and speed fluent oral communication. Teaching students to be aware of these functional formulaic sequences can help students connect ideas in their oral communication with less pauses and breaks for utterance formulation.

Lesson 4 is a discussion. With discussions, “learners are presented with a problem and have to express their opinions about it” (Golebiowska 5). Discussions differ from simulations because discussions do not change the participants’ role and focus on the current thoughts or feelings of the participants. This lesson will focus on weather idioms. Weather idioms are very common in American small talk and conversation. Familiarity and practice with weather idioms will certainly aid in developing oral fluency. It will benefit the students not only with their oral fluency through speaking, but also in their listening comprehension by having an understanding of the meaning of these different idioms. In this lesson, just about any category of idiom could be the topic in place of *weather*. Other categories of idioms that could replace the topic of *weather* are *military*, *animal* and *food*. The purpose of this lesson is to have the participants use the idioms to express complete ideas and thoughts with the idioms.

Section 4.8 outlines self-assessment and awareness raising activities that can be applied to this Unit Plan. They have not been included in the lessons because the basic guidelines and activities would be the same for each individual lesson and are best expressed in one independent section to avoid repetition. These self-assessment and awareness raising activities are nonetheless very important to the development of oral fluency as is explained in the section.



There should be serious consideration as to implementation of these activities for any curriculum focusing on oral fluency. Also, these activities can be used independently in the event that there is an extended amount of time remaining after a lesson has been implemented.

The descriptions of the lessons in this Unit Plan have been purposely left a little loose for interpretation. As it has been previously identified, these lessons could be modified for other purposes in an ESL/EFL class. For example, the exercises in these lessons could be used as warm-up activities to get the participants in the class engaged and working together to set up another activity or lesson to follow. These exercises could also be used to practice specific teaching points like using chains with specific vocabulary items in English for Academic Purposes classes or weather idioms to express emotions, thoughts or feelings in speech and in writing for a Journalism class. The specific classroom application of these lessons and the exercises within them could vary quite a bit depending on the classroom need. Because of this, the lessons will have open timing ranges attached to them, and they will have a variety of options for possible classroom application.

#### **4.4 Lesson 1**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction to Formulaic Sequences**

The objectives for Lesson 1 are as follows. First, this lesson will define formulaic sequences. Second, it will offer examples of different types of formulaic sequences. Third, it will allow for oral practice and discussion of formulaic sequences in the classroom between the teacher and the students. To begin this lesson, the teacher should define formulaic sequences. In section 2.2.4, formulaic sequences are defined as two or more words used as a phrase or as a ready-made grammatical construction that is understood with one holistic meaning or purpose. Examples of types of formulaic sequences are idioms, proverbs, multiword metaphors, phrasal

verbs and chain based formulas. Each one of these types of formulaic sequences should have an example attached to it for illustration. These examples should be written somewhere in the classroom (i.e. on the chalkboard, via PowerPoint or as a handout) for visual reference. A sample handout is in Appendix B. After the definition and examples are given to the students, the teacher could then ask the students for more examples of specific formulaic sequences. It will be up to the teacher to discern the validity and categorization of the examples offered by the students. This portion of the lesson could run between five and ten minutes based on the participation of the students and lecture length of the teacher.

Next, a more detailed examination of the many types of formulaic sequences will be undertaken. Tables 1-4 of this paper offer a variety of possibilities for demonstrating the many types and categories of formulaic sequences. Table 1 offers a large view of the many different names for formulaic sequences. Presenting this information to the class could expand the students' perception of what formulaic sequences are and give context to the amount of study that has gone into identifying and defining formulaic sequences. Tables 2, 3 and 4 present specific applications of formulaic sequences. Each of these three tables approaches formulaic sequences in a nuanced manner. Choosing which, if any or all, of these tables to present to a class should be decided upon carefully based on the needs and interests of the students. Too much information could be just as confusing as too little. The use of these tables should supplement the definitions and examples given at the beginning of the lesson and should be used to clarify and expand the definitions and examples previously discussed. The teacher should encourage the students to give their own examples to add to the information in the tables as much as balanced class participation will allow. Handouts could be made containing the tables being used in class for easy reference for the students. The running time for this discussion could

be anywhere between ten to twenty minutes depending on class participation and how many tables or how much information is presented by the teacher.

The speech community should be considered during this lecture portion of the class. If a specific speech community is important to the students in the class, then it should be woven into the introduction and discussion of formulaic sequences. For example, students planning on using English in either England or the United States would best be served by being given examples of formulaic sequences best suited to that specific country and/or region. Akin to this, students focusing on disciplines like engineering or journalism would need to become familiar with the formulaic sequences most common in those fields. Beyond the importance of having examples specific to the students' speech communities, the teacher would need to decide whether a definition or explanation of what a speech community is would be beneficial to the class. It is not absolutely necessary that students know what a speech community is to benefit from examples focused on particular speech communities. Section 3.1 of this paper contains ample information to define a speech community if it is determined necessary for a particular class. The presentation of this definition should not add more than a minute or two to the lecture.

The rest of the time allotted for this lesson should be spent by the students speaking in English with each other in a discussion of formulaic sequences. One way this could be accomplished would be by dividing the students into groups of three or four and then giving each group a table to discuss in more detail. This discussion could consist of the students creating questions about the table that they would like clarification on. This could be especially effective with tables 2, 3 and 4. There are bound to be questions regarding the different types and divisions of formulaic sequences. Each group could be asked to create at least two questions regarding the application or categorization of formulaic sequences in the table. These questions

could then be orally presented to the class by the groups and then be discussed by the teacher and other groups as a class. Groups should be allowed five to ten minutes to develop their questions about the table and ten to fifteen minutes should be available for the presentation of the questions by each group. It is important that each group have the opportunity to ask at least one question to the class, so the teacher should be sensitive to the time remaining in the lesson to ensure each group has an opportunity.

As a separate or additional activity to the one above, groups could be asked to develop a list of formulaic sequences for each category in their table. This exercise might work best if the whole class was focusing on just one of the tables so the lecture and explanation of the types of formulaic sequences in the table could be discussed more thoroughly in the beginning of the lesson. For example, considering Kecskes' Formulaic Continuum in Table 4, students could be divided into pairs or groups of three or four and then the groups could be given the task of thinking of two or more formulaic sequences as examples for each heading in the continuum that are different from the examples already given. This exercise could also require the students in each group to focus on only one of the categories in the continuum and make a more extensive list of just that one category. After the groups have had time to decide upon their examples, the groups would present their examples to the class in an oral presentation. These presentations could be as simple as just listing the examples, using the examples in sentences or creating a dialogue using the examples they have generated. The teacher should visit and monitor the groups to provide additional information or instruction during the group session. The time allotted for this exercise should be based on the demands given to the students. If students are just picking examples and presenting them as a list, the whole exercise could be completed in

less than ten minutes. If sentences or dialogues are being created, then ten to fifteen minutes of preparation followed by ten to fifteen minutes of presentation time will be needed.

#### **4.4.2 Lesson 1 Homework**

Homework for Lesson 1 could include the expansion of the above activities not used in class. Students could be asked to work individually, in pairs or in groups outside of class to create dialogues or short stories using different formulaic sequences discussed in class. These dialogues or stories would not have to be solely based on the categories and types of formulaic sequences focused on in the tables, but could also include formulaic sequences from the introductory lecture. These dialogues or stories could then be presented orally to the class on an assigned date. These oral presentations could take place at the beginning or ending of the following three lessons in this unit. This exercise would give the students more experience with formulaic sequences and would ensure students were practicing speaking English outside of the classroom.

Another homework assignment that could be done individually, in pairs or in groups would be to research a set number of the names of formulaic sequences in table 1. There are forty-seven names in the table to choose from. These could be divided up and given to individuals, pairs or groups to define and give examples of. If students researched these different names of formulaic sequences, they could come to understand the great diversity in how formulaic sequences are perceived and applied. This assignment could be turned in in writing or be given as oral presentations. Having students give oral presentations on their findings of these different names will not only provide more speaking experience for the students, but will also be an excellent opportunity for the students to teach each other about the nuances of formulaic sequences.

### **4.4.3 Lesson 1 Materials**

The materials needed for Lesson 1 include visual cues for the definition and examples of formulaic sequences in the introductory lecture and handouts of the tables for the exercises that follow. If PowerPoint or another projection type format is being used, make sure the classroom has the technology needed to support the format. A sample handout of an introduction to formulaic sequences is in Appendix B. If handouts of the tables 1-4 are needed, they could easily be recreated in a word processing program or copied directly from this document.

## **4.5 Lesson 2**

### **4.5.1 Academic Conversation Features**

The objectives of Lesson 2 are as follows. First, this lesson will explain the concepts of the Academic Conversation Features listed in table 5. Second, it will provide participants a list of formulaic sequences and stages that begin, maintain and summarize conversations. Third, this lesson will allow the participants the opportunity to practice oral communication using the Academic Conversation Features. This lesson should begin with the presentation of the Academic Conversation Features by Zwiers and Crawford that are presented in full in Section 3.2 and in table 5. The Features of Conversation (the leftmost heading in table 5) refers to the stages that can take place in a conversation. They are the cues for the different stages of conversation that the participants will use to have a conversation in the following exercise and that can be applied to real world conversation. These features are fairly self explanatory, but may need elaboration based on the questions and feedback of the participants. It should be explained that although these features are in a specific order in the table, these features could, and most likely will, appear in other orders based on the context and flow of any real world conversation.

After the Features of Conversation have been explained, connecting them with the formulaic sequences in the right two columns will form the basis of the classroom exercise.

The right two columns (Prompts for Using the Feature and Prompts for Responding) in table 5 contain the prompts (formulaic sequences) that correspond to the Features of Conversation. The features serve as reminders for participants during their oral communication practice on how to start, continue and end conversations; whereas the prompts associated with the features are the tools for maintaining the conversation during the class exercise. The list of prompts in table 5 is in no way exhaustive and should be adjusted to meet the needs of the class that will be using them. The explanation of table 5 with the inclusion of a question and answer period for clarification by the participants should take about ten to fifteen minutes of class time.

Next, a suitable topic should be presented for classroom conversation. This topic should be something familiar to all of the participants and detailed enough to support the features and prompts in table 5. If there is a common topic of reading material or experience among the participants pertaining to the class the lesson is being presented in, it would make a good selection. Otherwise, a topic may need to be assigned to the participants prior to the presentation of this lesson. Examples of possible topics would be a chapter or article read by all of the participants in the class; a film or TV show that all of the participants have seen; or a topic previously discussed in the class that could use the scrutinizing discussion of the Academic Conversation Features like the contents of table 1 that could have been used in Lesson 1. After the topic has been presented, the class should be divided into pairs. The participants can either pair off independently or be paired by the instructor. Either way, the participants are now ready to begin the practice conversations.

The pairs should have a copy of table 5 or a modified version of it to refer to during their conversations. A modified version of table 5 in a handout format is posted in Appendix C. One member should begin with the Prompts for Using the Feature and the other with the Prompts for Responding while the pairs use the Features of Conversation as a guide for the direction of the conversation. After the pairs have completed one conversation using the prompts under one heading, they should exchange headings and have the conversation again with the other prompts. The instructor should monitor the pairs during these conversations to answer questions and observe the use of the prompts and language in general. Questions by the participants and comments from the instructor can be answered or made on a pair by pair basis or at the end of the exercise to the whole class depending on the practicality and specificity of the situation. These conversations should take at least ten to fifteen minutes for the pairs to complete. Any remaining time in the class can be spent by changing partners and having another round of conversations, by reviewing the Academic Conversation Features as a class and/or with self-assessment and awareness raising activities.

#### **4.5.2 Lesson 2 Homework**

The homework for Lesson 2 could involve identifying the three categories of the Academic Conversation Features in natural language use. Participants could be given a blank worksheet with the three heading from table 5 on it. The Features of Conversation would be listed in that column and the participants would have to only fill in the first space to identify the topic of the conversation. Next, the participants would need to fill in the prompts in the two right columns that were used in the natural language conversation being monitored. The instructor would have to decide how much the participants would have to fill out of the worksheet with the understanding that not all conversations follow or contain all of the Features of Conversation



listed on the worksheet. A sample worksheet is given in Appendix D. The instructor's expectations would need to be clearly stated to the participants to assure consistent results with the homework assignment.

Possible sources for conversations for this homework assignment could be chosen by either the instructor or the participants. Whatever the scenario, two specific guidelines for selecting conversations for this assignment should be considered. First, it needs to be specified that the conversations should be audio conversations. The point of this Unit Plan is to improve oral fluency, and listening to the language is a good way to that. The conversations could be in person, broadcast or prerecorded; as long as the conversations are in an audio format, they will work for this assignment. Also, if the participants use written transcripts of conversations, they may end up just scanning the written word for the "answers" and end up not paying attention to the context and use of the formulaic sequences. Second, if the instructor is not going to select specific live or prerecorded conversations, then some sources should be offered to the participants of where to find good audio conversations. Some sources would be archived audio files of lectures that are on file in most libraries; posted or live conversations on the internet through various podcasts and websites; television or radio news or journalism broadcasts; or a live event (like a debate or forum) where a single topic or subject will be focused on. The selection of a good audio conversation is most important to the success of this assignment.

#### **4.5.3 Lesson 2 Materials**

The materials for Lesson 2 consist of the modified Academic Conversation Features (Appendix C), the Academic Conversation Features Worksheet (Appendix D) and an audio selection for the homework assignment. The use and need of these materials should be based on the activities, resources and practicality for the instructor and participants applying this lesson.

## **4.6 Lesson 3**

### **4.6.1 Chains**

The objectives of Lesson 3 are as follows. First, this lesson will explain the formulaic sequences identified as chains by Stubbs that were described in Section 2.3.3. Second, it will provide the opportunity to practice a simulation while working in pairs. Third, this lesson will allow oral communication practice and presentation for the participants. Being that this lesson is a simulation, the teacher will first have to decide what roles the students will be taking on and how many students will be working together during this exercise. Depending on the class size, this lesson could work for either pairs or groups and the roles should match any real world speaking environment immediately relevant to the students. The importance of this relevancy is that students should be able to use their experiences in this lesson for real world language use. If the roles in this lesson are too abstract or fall outside of the students' realm of knowledge, it may be difficult for the students to apply what they learned in their actual language use. For example, clerk/shopper, doctor/patient, colleague/colleague, teacher/student or supervisor/employee roles, among others, could all be explored with this exercise. On the other hand, more potentially abstract or unrealistic roles such as astronaut/mission control, president/board of trustee or actor/reporter, may be fun, but less applicable to daily life. The roles of teacher/student were chosen for this lesson purely for demonstration and relevance to student life. The students in this lesson will be working in pairs. If this lesson was going to be used for students working in groups, a role definition would be needed for each student in the group. In this lesson, only two role definitions will be discussed that of the teacher and of the student.

Clear role definitions need to be provided to the students (participants) by the teacher (presenter). As defined previously, simulations assign roles to justify or stimulate conversation.

These roles must have motivation and direction for participants to follow. For example, student roles could have the motivation of initiating a conversation with their teacher to make an appointment to discuss a topic from the class further. The student role, in this case, would be initiating the conversation and the teacher role would be responding to the student. The teacher role could initiate the conversation by asking to speak to a student at the end of the class about an assignment. A sample list of teacher/student roles prepared for four pairs of participants is listed in table 6. The roles will be defined as initiator and responder roles with teacher and student having two of each type. The initiator role will be the participant who will begin the simulation and the responder role will reply to the initiator. The role definitions will give the participants a starting point for their conversation and a context in which to talk. The formulaic sequence chains will then be used by the participants in the context of their roles.

Table 6 Role Definitions

<b>Teacher Initiator</b>	<b>Student Responder</b>
1. Before class, "How's your class load this semester?"; inquiring about student's wellbeing	1. Not too bad; satisfied, but challenged academically
2. After class, "Did you like the film clip about _____?"; curious	2. Student choice for response; good, bad, indifferent
<b>Student Initiator</b>	<b>Teacher Responder</b>
3. Setting up an appointment after class to discuss a lecture topic in more detail	3. Negotiating a meeting time based on office hours
4. Meeting with the teacher to discuss the lecture topic	4. Giving direction on how to explore the topic in further detail

Next, the specific formulaic sequence chains need to be identified. Below are eight of the most commonly used chains identified in Stubbs' research that have been chosen for this activity. They are:

- by the end of the
- in the middle of the
- on the edge of the
- at the bottom of the
- in the case of the
- towards the end of the
- on the part of the
- at the time of the

These eight chains are not necessarily the best choices for every class. Instructors desiring to implement this lesson should fully review the list in Appendix A to select the best group of chains for the individual needs of their classes. If there are common chains in the speech community the participants will be experiencing, those chains would be the ideal chains to use in this lesson. The eight chains selected above have been selected purely for the purpose of demonstration for this lesson.

The chain pattern should be identified and explained by the instructor before the participants begin the simulation. The instructor's explanation of chains can be formed from the information previously discussed in this paper and by using the sample simulation for Lesson 2 presented in table 7. A basic example of an explanation of chains could be as simple as identifying the PREP *the* NOUN *of the* pattern and then giving some examples independent of context and then some examples in a conversational context. It should be made clear in the instruction that chains are fixed groups of words commonly used to connect information in communication. Demonstrating the use of different prepositions in various contexts could be valuable in the explanation as well. For instance, chains using the same preposition could be presented to focus on that specific preposition's many functions in changing contexts or chains

conveying time or place could be grouped together for this activity. The explanation of the chains should be as long or short and detailed as the instructor deems fit for the specific group of participants. This explanation and example lecture could take as short as two to three minutes or as long as ten to fifteen minutes.

Table 7 Sample Simulation Using Role Scenario 1

- Teacher: How's your class load this semester?
- Student: It's okay, but *by the end of the day*, I'm pretty tired.
- Teacher: *In the case of this* class, how do you feel?
- Student: I don't always understand everything *at the beginning of* class, but *towards the end of* class, I feel like I understand.
- Teacher: That's good. I can tell that sometimes *in the middle of the* class some students are a little confused. So, I try to make things clear *by the end of* class.
- Student: Thank you. That really helps. Do you have my assignment from last class?
- Teacher: Yes, I do. Here it is *at the bottom of the* pile. I wrote comments *on the edge of the* paper. Do you have any questions about the assignment?
- Student: Well, *on the part of the* assignment where I had to use MLA citation, I had some trouble.
- Teacher: That's alright, because we're going to talk about that today in detail.
- Student: Good.

Participants will work in their pairs to create a conversation using the chains provided. For this exercise, students will be asked to use at least three different chains each in their simulations as exemplified in table 7. In so doing, each pair of participants will be working with six

different chains. This will hopefully provide the participants with enough exposure to chains to at least become familiar with their use and function. Participants ought to be given about five to ten minutes to prepare their simulations. Each conversation should run about 1-2 minutes. This will give the participants the opportunity to exchange in conversation at least three times while using at least three of the chains each. After the participants have prepared their simulation, the pairs could present it to the class. The purpose of having the participants present their simulations to the class is to give them more opportunity to practice their oral communication in different settings and situations. For instance, when the participants are presenting their simulations, they should choose where they are going to orient themselves in the room for their particular role. Participants will have to decide whether their roles are standing, sitting or walking or if they are in a classroom, hallway, office or elsewhere on campus. It is important for the presenter to encourage the participants to be as natural and realistic as possible in their simulations to mimic the actual situation they are enacting.

These presentations should be as stress free and as natural as possible. Feedback by the presenter or other participants regarding each group's simulation could be written, spoken or direct comments could be omitted altogether. Whether comments are allowed will be determined by the amount of time available for the lesson and the presenter's feel for the make-up of the class. If it is a small, tight knit group, in class comments could be very constructive and helpful. If it is a larger group or a group unfamiliar with each other, there might not be time for or there might not be constructive outcomes for comments. Regardless of whether in class comments are or are not used, the presenter of the activity should make note of each group's simulation to ensure that there is feedback for each participant's correct or incorrect use of the chains. It is up to the presenter's discretion to determine how and what feedback will be given to the participants

in class and/or outside of class. The only in class feedback for the presenter that would be absolutely necessary would be if one of the participants or pairs grossly misused a chain during their presentation. It would be important to tactfully explain and correct the error so the participants have the correct understanding and use of chains.

During the presentations, participants who are not giving the presentations can be asked to keep track of the chains in the presentations they are watching. The participants keeping track of the chains could either write down and then hand in the chains they identified at the end of the presentations to the instructor or the participants could tell the presenters after each presentation which chains were used. The former could be done if there was a limited amount of time for the exercise and the later if there was ample time. Having the participants keep track of the chains in the presentations will assist them in their active listening during the presentations as well as offering more repetition and exposure to the chains being practiced in the lesson. As has been identified in Section 1 of this paper, repetition of the target language and the conscious identification of speech patterns are both important to the improvement and development of oral fluency. The length of time needed for the presentations and feedback for the presentations will certainly vary according to the number of pairs presenting. It would be best to allow about three to five minutes for each presentation and the feedback following.

#### **4.6.2 Lesson 3 Homework**

Homework for Lesson 3 could have the participants find three, five or maybe ten different occurrences of chains and how they were used in spoken native English language use. Participants should be encouraged to find chains in the spoken language using conversations they have with fluent English speakers and by listening to audio via radio, TV or the internet. Chains could surely be found in written text, but participants should be encouraged to listen to the

spoken language since spoken language can differ from written language. This will also provide the participants with spoken language input that, as identified in Section 1 of this paper, can help increase fluent language production in language learners. Participants could be asked to hand write or type the chains they have found to be handed in to the instructor at a specific time or they could present their chains and how they were used orally to the class; whichever is most appropriate.

A couple possible variations of the above homework assignment could also be implemented by the instructor as in class or at home assignments. First, participants could be given a list of chains and be asked to find those chains in the spoken language somewhere. Participants would then document where they found the chains and present their findings orally to the class or in writing to the instructor. Whether the chains are found by having conversations or listening to recorded audio, the participants would be actively working on their oral fluency while focusing on formulaic sequence chains. This version of the activity would need to be accomplished by the participants outside of class.

Another option for instructors would be to find audio excerpts containing chains for the participants to listen to and identify. The instructor could write the target chains on the chalkboard, on a handout or let the participants identify the chains independently for this exercise. The participants would then listen to the audio to identify the chains therein. The difficulty with this version of the exercise is that it could be hard to find suitable audio clips with enough examples of chains in them to be effective as a teaching tool. Finding the right audio clips might be difficult, but once the clips are found, they can be used repeatedly with different classes over the years. This version of the exercise could be done in class if the proper AV



equipment was available in the classroom or outside of class if the audio file could be made available as a hard copy or electronically through the internet for the participants.

#### **4.6.3 Lesson 3 Materials**

The materials needed for Lesson 3 consist of a handout for each participant in the class containing one Initiator/Responder pairs and the eight formulaic sequences. Each handout should have an Initiator/Responder match with another handout so participants can match up roles with another participant in the class if random pair assignment is preferred. If participants select their own partners, then one handout could be given to each pair. When there are an odd number of participants in the activity, one group of three will need to be made. In this group, there would be two student roles and one teacher role. If there is enough time in the class for the participant pairs to complete more than one scenario, then one handout could be given to each pair with multiple scenarios on it. There could also be a cue on the handout that directs the participants to stage their simulations in a natural or realistic setting. Zwiers and Crawford's Conversation Features could also be added to the handout for reference. A sample handout for Lesson 3 is in Appendix E. On the other hand, it is not necessary to create a handout for the class. The instructions could just as easily be written on the chalkboard or posted in the classroom where all of the participants could easily see and refer to them. As long as all of the information concerning the chains and scenarios are made available to the participants, any presentation format is acceptable.

#### **4.7 Lesson 4**

##### **4.7.1 Weather Idioms**

Lesson 4 will focus on weather idioms used in a discussion format. The objectives for this lesson are as follows. First, this lesson will explain the meaning and use of selected weather

idioms. Second, it will provide discussion topics to facilitate the use of the weather idioms. Third, this lesson will allow students to use weather idioms in an organized discussion. In Section 2.2, idioms were in some way, shape or form categorized as formulaic sequences from Wray's list in table 1 through to Kecskes' Continuum in table 4. Idioms are also very common in everyday native language use in a variety of speech communities as identified by Wray and Hymes in Section 3.1. Therefore, instructors of this lesson will have to decide on topics appropriate for their classes. These topics should be known to the participants, because the participants must be able to express their own opinions on them. Three possible topics for discussion in this lesson are listed in table 8. The topics chosen for this lesson should be broad enough for all of the participants to have a basic knowledge of them and narrow enough to focus the discussion for the participants. It is advisable to avoid topics that could be divisive or controversial for the participants unless the class applying this lesson is specifically focused on some such topic. For instance, religion and politics would be examples of topics that could lead to disagreements among participants. If participants are from opposing belief systems, the learning experience of this lesson could turn into frustration, anxiety or even anger among the participants. This lesson should be an opportunity to use discussion to practice and learn weather idioms and not to argue or debate belief systems. This lesson is an opportunity for an Academic English class to focus on idiomatic language frequently used in the given discipline. If this is the case, a careful survey of the academic discipline should be taken to identify the best topics and idioms for group discussion.

Next, a list of weather idioms must be compiled for the participants to learn. Appendix F contains a sample of weather idioms that could be used in this activity. Whatever idioms are chosen for this lesson, they should be chosen based on their popularity in native speaker use and

for the different meanings they convey. There are many more weather idioms available to choose from besides those listed in Appendix F. A quick search of “weather idioms” on Google or any other internet search engine will bring up a variety of web sites with long lists of weather idioms and other idioms of all sorts. Whatever idioms are chosen, they should be selected based on the needs and interests of the participants in the class.

Table 8 Lesson 4 Topics

Music	Food	Academics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favorite/least favorite style, artist, instrument, radio station, album/CD/download</li> <li>• of friends, family, TV/ movies- different or same as own</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favorite/least favorite fruit/vegetable/meat, restaurant, dining experience</li> <li>• Culturally specific foods- own or others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favorite/least favorite teacher, subject, school</li> <li>• Around campus activities- sports, the arts, dining, student clubs and organizations</li> </ul>

To begin this lesson, the presenter should introduce and explain what a discussion is and how the participants should approach this exercise. The most basic explanation of a discussion is two or more people having a conversation about a topic. Discussions have no roles for the participants to play or scenarios for the participants to follow. A discussion is a free flowing communication between people based on their own personal experience and knowledge. Participants should be encouraged to express their own experiences and knowledge while participating in this lesson for the purpose of using the idioms in the most natural and reality

based way. This will hopefully aid the participants in recalling the idioms for later outside of the classroom use. Participants should be encouraged to express themselves using the target idioms during the group discussion exercise, but should also be instructed to be mindful that everyone in the group have the opportunity to speak. This introduction should only take two to three minutes to explain. It could take longer if the participants have clarification questions.

Next, the instructor should divide the participants into groups of three to five. The number of participants in the groups should be determined by the class size. The volume level in the class can become an issue depending on how many groups there are. A class of 21 divided into seven groups of three will have seven participants speaking at one time which could become very loud in the classroom. It could also pose a problem for each group to find their own space in the room to work in. That same class of 21 could be divided into four groups of four and one group of five. This would decrease the volume in the classroom by only having five participants talking at one time and could possibly make it easier for each group to find their own space in the classroom. Conversely, a class of ten participants would be best divided into two groups of three and one group of four instead of two groups of five. Two groups of five could lead to an awkward silence in the classroom because only two students would be talking at a time; whereas the three smaller groups would offer each participant more opportunity to speak. Generally, in groups of three or four, the participants will most likely have more opportunity to speak than in groups of five or more. It becomes increasingly difficult for each participant to speak and participate when groups have more than five individuals.

The group discussion could be the exercise of this lesson in and of itself or a presentation by each group could be a result of the discussion. Before groups begin their discussions, the presenter could ask each group to keep track of examples of the use of the idioms in their

discussions. During this exercise, the instructor should monitor the groups to ascertain that each member of the group is participating. This could be done by the instructor joining in with each group conversation for a short time or by observing the classroom as a whole and identifying and aiding those groups and individuals that may need assistance. The length of the group discussions should be determined based on two factors. First, the length should be determined by the level of participation within the groups. If the groups are having active and robust conversation, the discussions will naturally last longer. If the discussion has stalled within the groups and silence overcomes the room, then the exercise has ended itself. The second factor for determining the length of the discussion should be based on the time allowances for the class. Active discussions may need to be cut short to allow for presentations or stalled discussions may need to be stoked by expanding or refocusing the topics. Whatever the circumstance may be, the participants should be afforded at least ten minutes to discuss the topic.

After each group has had an opportunity to discuss the topic using the idioms, each group could pick a spokesperson to present examples of the use of the idioms from the group's discussion or participants in the group could present their own individual examples. The presentations after the discussions would give the presenter and the participants in the other groups an opportunity to see how the idioms were used in each conversation. This would allow the presenter to expand upon the many meanings and uses of the idioms in the presented examples and make gentle corrections if idioms have been used incorrectly. The process of having each group present examples could be very time consuming and should only be considered if class time permits. If each group's presentation is less than two minutes, and only a minute or two of questions or explanations following each presentation, a classroom of three or four groups presenting would most likely take ten or more minutes.

Another exercise that could be a part of Lesson 4 would be to have the participants in each group create through drawing or dramatization literal and idiomatic meanings for selected idioms. This exercise can be done two ways. The first way would be to give the participants the idiom with its idiomatic meaning and have them illustrate the idiomatic and literal meaning of the idiom from that information. For example, from the weather idioms in Appendix F, the idiom “head in the clouds” could literally be illustrated by a person with clouds around his/her head or idiomatically by a person sitting with his/her head in hand staring off in deep thought. The second way would be to give the participants the idioms but not give them the idiomatic meaning. With this version, participants could still create and illustrate the literal meaning of the idiom, but would have to guess at the idiomatic meaning. This could be a lot of fun and could lead to interesting classroom discussion regarding the target idioms. Whichever version is used in the classroom, each group would receive three to five idioms to work with. The number of idioms given to each group should be practical for the amount of time allowed for the exercise. The more idioms groups have, the longer it will take groups to illustrate and present their idiom illustrations. The groups should be given five to ten minutes to create their presentations and a minute or two each to present to the class.

#### **4.7.2 Lesson 4 Homework**

A good, but possibly difficult, homework assignment for this lesson would be for the participants to find the origin of one or more of the target idioms in addition to the idiomatic meaning of the idioms. This could include finding the first recorded or dated use of the idiom and/or the history or original meaning of the idiom. After the participants have compiled the information, they could give an oral report of their findings to the class. Participants could also submit a written account or essay of their findings as well. The difficulty in this assignment

would be actually finding information about the idioms that is scholarly. A general “Google” search of an idiom will bring up thousands of websites, but many of them do not contain relevant or reliable information. There are many publications which contain the meanings and origins of idioms, but not all libraries are stocked with these books and having participants purchase such books for one assignment is not practical. In light of this, Appendix G contains a list of internet sources that have origins of idioms that appear to be from scholarly or reliable sources and some publications that contain idiom origins. If this assignment is going to be assigned to a class, it would be best for the instructor to ensure that the idioms being assigned to each participant has an origin that is accessible to the participant; otherwise, this could be a frustrating, time consuming and unproductive assignment for some.

Another homework assignment could be to record the use of one or more of the target idioms in natural, native speech. This is similar to what is described in Lesson 3. Participants could listen to audio sources (TV, radio, internet, live conversation, etc.) and record the context, meaning and tone the idiom was used in. This would be done outside of the classroom. This exercise could also be done in class if the presenter has audio examples that contain the target idioms for the participants to identify. Completing this exercise will give the participants the opportunity to focus on the target idiom as it occurs naturally in speech, and having the participants reflect on the context, meaning and tone that the idiom was used in will help the participants gain a greater understanding of how the idiom is used. If this assignment was assigned as homework, participants would need to have time to survey enough material to find the target idioms. The participants could then be required to make oral presentations to the class concerning their findings. The oral presentations could lead to interesting classroom discussion about the nuances of the idioms, because it is likely that more than one participant will find the

same idiom used in a different context with a different tone. These nuances will hopefully aid the participants in understanding and then applying the depth and breadth of the target idioms. For example, “once in a blue moon” could in one instance be used negatively to state that something may never happen, or in another instance, to state in a hopeful manner that something could happen soon. Both examples use the idiom to convey that something rarely happens, but the context and tone of the examples differ.

#### **4.7.3 Lesson 4 Materials**

The materials for this lesson can vary based on the needs of the instructor and the participants. The only two items absolutely necessary to implement Lesson 4 are a list of idioms and topics for the participants to discuss. These two lists could be made into handouts and given to each participant or could be displayed in the classroom where all of the participants could have easy access to them. This decision should be made based on the needs of the participants and set up of the classroom.

#### **4.8 Self-Assessment and Awareness Raising Exercises**

One self-assessment that could be done after the presentations or at the end of the class would be to have participants do self-awareness and reflection exercises based on their use of formulaic sequences. This exercise is meant to be completed independently by each individual participant and could be done during class or as homework depending on the exercise and/or classroom practicality. Participants could be asked to write in journals regarding their experiences with the lesson. This is a great option if language journals are already being used in the classroom. If journals are not being used by the participants, this self-reflection could be written as a brief one page reflection or each participant could offer their thoughts orally to the class, if time permits.



Another way the journals or reflections could be completed by the participants would be in a recorded audio electronic format. An audio electronic format would allow the participants to speak their journal entries instead of writing them. Audio files of the journal entries or reflections would not only offer another opportunity to practice oral communication for the participants but it could also aid in self-assessment if the files were reviewed chronologically at the end of the class. Participants could be provided with electronic recording devices or use their own device. If the learning institution will be responsible for providing the electronic recording devices, most desktop computers have the capability of recording audio with little or no addition equipment or programming and/or portable digital recorders could be made available to the participants. Participants could also use their own computers or other recording devices. Most cell phones and MP3 players have the capability of digitally recording audio. If the journal entries are to be turned in to the instructor, the completed audio files could be emailed or uploaded to the instructor in the format and to the location identified for the class.

Concerning the completion of the reflections, participants could be asked to identify in their journals what worked and what did not work for them in the lesson; they could be asked to identify any questions they have about the specific formulaic sequences and how to use them; and/or ways in which they could apply them to their English language use. This reflection exercise is intended to help the participants think about the lesson and how it could be applied to their English language use. These reflections could be collected by the instructor for review or left for the participants to complete on their honor. If the instructor chooses to collect the exercises, it is important not to be critical of the participants' reflections. These reflections are meant to encourage the participants to think about how they use the language, not pressure them into trying to satisfy the instructor. The instructor can take information (questions, confusions,

misconceptions) from the reflections and blend it into future classroom lessons or address the writers individually.

Nakatani's awareness raising strategies could be applied and encouraged throughout these lessons. Integrating the achievement strategies of help-seeking, modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, maintenance and self-solving would be very beneficial. For example, in these lessons, help-seeking, modified interaction and modified output could be actively encouraged by the instructor. This could be accomplished by the instructor with one-on-one communication with participants as well as encouraged between participants with their interactions. The time-gaining strategy could be explained and exemplified by the instructor in the initial presentation of the lessons and then be applied in the exercises by the participants. Participants could be asked to use the maintenance strategy to practice the target formulaic sequences as they have been used by their partners in the exercises and the self-solving strategy could be encouraged as a way to apply the target formulaic sequences of the lesson. Along with the awareness raising strategies of Nakatani, the self-assessment questionnaires by de Saint Léger could also be given at important stages of the oral communication curriculum.

Depending on the duration and frequency of attendance of the individual class, self-assessment questionnaires could be helpful and valuable to language learners. The questionnaire presented by de Saint Léger's had class participation based multiple choice items, open-ended questions focusing on language use perceptions and self-rating scales for individual language use. As previously discussed in Section 1, the questionnaires can be very beneficial in several ways for language learners. There is a sample questionnaire in Appendix A of "Self-Assessment of Speaking Skills and Participation in a Foreign Language Class" by de Saint Léger. If it is decided that questionnaires are appropriate for a class, the questionnaires should be given at least

twice over the duration of the class: once at the beginning and once again at or near the end of the class. If the class is taking place over the course of more than three months, the questionnaire could be given an additional time at the mid-point of the class. It is important to be mindful of how often the questionnaires are given because the participants should have enough time between questionnaires to see change in their perceptions of their language skills. If a questionnaire is going to be used in a class, careful consideration should be taken for the length and content of the questionnaire so it is appropriate for the participants and the overall classroom setting.

## CONCLUSION

Oral communication is a very creative and free flowing form of language use, but does not consist of wholly unique and independently creative utterances. The glue that connects these unique and independent utterances is the formulaic sequence. This is why formulaic sequences are an integral part of fluent oral communication, because they help solve many of the problems identified as nonfluency. Formulaic sequences can increase the rate of speech, reduce false starts and reformulations and limit self-repetitions and frequent pauses for language learners by providing the fixed chunks of language that begin, continue and conclude effective oral communication. Without these fully formed phrasal sequences at the ready of the language user, communication can become slow, disconnected and awkward. The knowledge of and ability to use a variety of functional and idiomatic formulaic sequences will help language learners to gain “fluent” language skills and achieve the definition of fluency stated in Section 1.1: a person’s ability to use language to express complete thoughts in a variety of semantic and grammatical forms with ease using appropriate intonation without excessive or unnatural hesitations or pauses.

The sheer volume of formulaic sequences in the English language can be quite daunting for the teacher or the student who desires to improve oral fluency skills. The many different names for formulaic sequences presented in table 1 and the over 130 chains listed in Appendix A demonstrate this point. Therefore, the categories and types of formulaic sequences need to be reviewed closely to determine which formulaic sequences are best for any group of language learners. Language learners who will be using English for scientific research will likely need formulaic sequences that could differ greatly from those needed by learners focusing on Journalism. The proper balance of functional and idiomatic formulaic sequences needs to be

discerned for each individual class and group of students. Nevertheless, the right combination of formulaic sequences chosen from the full spectrum of formulaic sequences will equip language learners with the tools needed to reach higher levels of oral fluency in their target language use.

Selecting this “right combination” of formulaic sequences could be based on many factors; chief among them should be the speech community that the learner will be using the language in. The learners’ intended speech community should narrow the wide field of formulaic sequences down to a more manageable size. As identified above, learners entering a scientific speech community may want to focus more on the functional sequences that connect the flow of ideas in the given discipline. Likewise, learners focusing on Journalism may be better prepared in their speech community with more idiomatic and/or metaphorical sequences. But, just as important as the learners’ academic, business or personal understanding of specific speech community formulaic sequences, there are the regional speech communities that should also be considered. For instance, if native Japanese speakers are in Japan studying English in preparation to attend a university in Western Wisconsin, then the most commonly used formulaic sequences of that Western Wisconsin speech community should be considered for that group of learners. Not only will this better prepare the students in their oral communication, but it will also assist them in their listening skills when they get there.

The presentation and use of formulaic sequences for improving oral fluency by teachers in the classroom is likely the biggest challenge presented in this paper. Often times, in the language learning classroom, practicing oral communication skills including formulaic sequences with the target language does not receive as much time as other skills or activities such as lecture, vocabulary, grammar, reading or writing. Practicing speaking in the classroom can also be very time consuming and can be difficult to assess the effectiveness of for each

individual learner. Teaching formulaic sequences can combine many of these skills into one lesson. For instance, formulaic sequences in and of themselves can be presented as vocabulary items. Each sequence functions as a holistic meaning just like an individual vocabulary item. Many formulaic sequences have verbs, articles, prepositions and phrasal qualities that could easily fit into any grammar lesson level. In other words, formulaic sequences could be used in complicated or simple grammatical structure instruction. If journaling is being used in the classroom, formulaic sequences could add to the depth of topics for those writing exercises. In regards to the use of time for speaking in the classroom, students who are engaged in activities with their peers are often students who are engaged in the learning experience. Formulaic sequences not only connect language skills for learners, but they also provide the necessary tools for improving oral communication.

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**APPENDIX A: STUBBS' CHAINS**

at the end of the  
 in the middle of the  
 the other side of the  
 in the case of the  
 and at the same time  
 as a matter of fact  
 as a result of the  
 at the beginning of the  
 by the end of the  
 for the first time in  
 at the top of the  
 at the time of the  
 on the part of the  
 at the bottom of the  
 in the house of commons  
 the turn of the century  
 from the point of view  
 the point of view of  
 on the other side of  
 in the same way as  
 it seems to me that  
 of agriculture fisheries and food  
 there is no doubt that  
 all the rest of it  
 in the form of a  
 on the other hand the  
 and all the rest of  
 as far as I can  
 on the edge of the  
 towards the end of the

at the same time the  
 is one of the most  
 this is one of the  
 at the end of a  
 in such a way as  
 the second half of the  
 for the first time the  
 go on to the next  
 in the centre of the  
 it may well be that  
 on the basis of the  
 thank you very much indeed  
 the end of the year  
 the secretary of state for  
 ask the minister of agriculture  
 for the first time since  
 it is not surprising that  
 on the far side of  
 such a way as to  
 the far side of the  
 the minister of agriculture fisheries  
 the right hon and learned  
 to ask the minister of  
 as far as I know  
 at the back of the  
 but on the other hand  
 for the rest of the  
 in the direction of the  
 in the house of lords  
 in the light of the

it is clear that the  
 on the one hand and  
 on the other hand it  
 on to the next question  
 the book of common prayer  
 the end of the war  
 the first half of the  
 to be found in the  
 what are you going to  
 as in the case of  
 at the foot of the  
 in the case of a  
 in the first world war  
 of the house of commons  
 of violence against the person  
 and so on and so  
 are you going to do  
 at the expense of the  
 at the turn of the  
 crimes of violence against the  
 far side of the field  
 in the course of the  
 in the second half of  
 it was the first time  
 it would have to be  
 on either side of the  
 the way in which the  
 there can be no doubt  
 to the next question from  
 he was one of the  
 I mean I don't know

in the context of a  
 in the early years of  
 increase in the number of  
 is not to say that  
 it is not possible to  
 nothing to do with the  
 of the church of england  
 on the back of the  
 on the other hand there  
 on the side of the  
 one of the things that  
 the far end of the  
 the other end of the  
 the rest of the world  
 there was no sign of  
 to the end of the  
 while at the same time  
 an hour and a half  
 and the rest of the  
 as a result of a  
 at the other end of  
 but at the same time  
 do you want me to  
 due to the fact that  
 for a long time and  
 I would have thought that  
 if he will make a  
 in and out of the  
 in the church of England  
 in the context of the  
 is to be found in

it is not easy to  
it should be remembered that  
it was going to be  
it was one of the  
it would have been a  
no I don't think so  
the effects of noise on  
the end of the first  
the extent to which the  
the fact that he was  
to the secretary of state  
was one of the most  
we go on to the

## APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTION TO FORMULAIC SEQUENCES HANDOUT

**Formulaic Sequences Definition:** two or more words used as a phrase or as a ready-made grammatical construction that is understood with one holistic meaning or purpose.

### Examples of Types of Formulaic Sequences

- **Idioms**
  - *It's raining cat and dogs*- it's raining very heavily
  - *He kicked the bucket*- he died or is dead
- **Proverbs**
  - *The squeaky wheel gets the grease*- if you complain about something, you can get better service. No one's going to help you if you wait quietly.
  - *A picture is worth a thousand words*- pictures convey emotions and messages better than written or spoken explanations.
- **Multiword Metaphors**
  - *Gobbled up*- consumed quickly
  - *Looking forward*- anticipating the future
- **Phrasal Verbs**
  - *Break down*- stop functioning; get upset
  - *Get over*- recover from illness; overcome a problem
- **Chain Based**
  - PREP *the* NOUN *of the*- by the end of the day
  - *As a matter of fact*- sentence starter to relay information

### APPENDIX C: MODIFIED ACADEMIC CONVERSATION FEATURES

Features of Conversations	Prompts for Using the Feature	Prompts for Responding
Come up with a worthy topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think the author wrote this?</li> <li>• What are some themes that emerged in...?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the author wrote it to teach us about...</li> <li>• One theme might be...</li> </ul>
Elaborate and clarify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you elaborate?</li> <li>• What do you mean by...?</li> <li>• Can you tell me more about...?</li> <li>• What makes you think that?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think it means that...</li> <li>• In other words...</li> </ul>
Support ideas with examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you give an example? Can you show me where it says that?</li> <li>• Can you be more specific? Are there any cases of that?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example...</li> <li>• In the text it said that...</li> <li>• One case showed that...</li> </ul>
Build on or challenge another's idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think?</li> <li>• Can you add to this idea?</li> <li>• Do you agree?</li> <li>• What might be other points of view?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would add that...</li> <li>• Then again, I think that...</li> <li>• I want to expand on your point about...</li> </ul>
Apply/Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So how can we apply this idea to our lives?</li> <li>• What can we learn from this character/part/story?</li> <li>• If you were...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my life...</li> <li>• I think it can teach us...</li> <li>• If I were...,</li> <li>• I would have...</li> </ul>
Paraphrase and summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have we discussed so far?</li> <li>• How should we summarize what we talked about?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can say that...</li> <li>• The main theme/point of the text seems to be...</li> </ul>

### APPENDIX D: ACADEMIC CONVERSATION FEATURES WORKSHEET

<b>Features of Conversations</b>	<b>Prompts for Using the Feature</b>	<b>Prompts for Responding</b>
Come up with a worthy topic Topic _____ Title: _____		
Elaborate and clarify		
Support ideas with examples		
Build on or challenge another's idea		
Apply/Connect		
Paraphrase and summarize		

**APPENDIX E: SAMPLE SIMULATION HANDOUT**

Group 1

**Scenario:**

<b>Teacher Initiator</b>	<b>Student Responder</b>
1. Before class, “How’s your class load this semester?”; inquiring about student’s wellbeing	1. Not too bad; satisfied, but challenged academically

**Chains:**

- by the end of the
- in the middle of the
- on the edge of the
- at the bottom of the
- in the case of the
- towards the end of the
- on the part of the
- at the time of the

**Setting:** In the classroom. The teacher is standing and the student is sitting at a desk.



**APPENDIX F: ADDITIONAL WEATHER IDIOMS**

- Head in the clouds
- Hot under the collar
- Brighten up the day
- In a fog
- When it rains, it pours
- The calm before the storm
- Under the weather
- Once in a blue moon
- Fair-weather friend
- Come rain or shine

## **APPENDIX G: IDIOM WEBSITE SOURCES**

<http://www.pride-unlimited.com/probono/idioms1.html>

<http://www.knowyourphrase.com/>

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/>

<http://www.bachelorsdegree.org/2011/01/30/30-common-english-idioms-and-the-history-behind-them/>

<http://www.backroadstouring.co.uk/phraseorigins.php>

<http://www.squidoo.com/origins-of-words-and-phrases>

<http://www.neatorama.com/2008/08/07/origins-of-familiar-phrases/>

### Publications

Scholastic Dictionary of Idioms by Marvin Terban

The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms by Christine Ammer

1000 English Idioms Explained by Foulsham & Co. Ltd