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Effects of Formulaic Language on EFL Learners' Speaking Performance

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RESUMEN

Se ha asumido que el lenguaje formulaico contribuye con el desempeño oral de los estudiantes de inglés debido a su característica de facilitar la producción y comprensión del lenguaje. En consecuencia, en los últimos años, los investigadores han intentado demostrar si el lenguaje formulaico podría desarrollar y mejorar la capacidad oral de los estudiantes de inglés. Esta síntesis de investigación explora y analiza la influencia y los efectos del lenguaje formulaico en el desempeño oral de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua foránea (EFL). Dieciocho estudios publicados desde el año 2000 que mostraron resultados positivos y negativos con respecto al tema de investigación fueron sintetizados y analizados. Los hallazgos mostraron que el lenguaje formulaico juega un papel importante en el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes de inglés. Por consiguiente, la fluidez es uno de los principales efectos que el conocimiento del lenguaje formulaico puede aportar al desempeño oral de los alumnos. Adicionalmente, estos resultados sugieren que la disponibilidad del lenguaje formulaico puede ayudar a los estudiantes a añadir fluidez a su discurso y, por lo tanto, a presentarse como hablantes competentes. Los resultados de la presente síntesis de investigación pueden crear conciencia sobre la idoneidad de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del lenguaje formulaico y promover futuras investigaciones con respecto al fenómeno para establecer un punto de vista más claro.

Palabras clave: Lenguaje formulaico. Desempeño oral. Fluidez. Competencia Oral.

ABSTRACT

Formulaic language has been assumed to assist English learners' speaking performance due to its characteristic of facilitating language production and comprehension. Accordingly, over the last years, researchers have attempted to demonstrate whether formulaic language might develop and improve English learners speaking ability. This research synthesis explores and analyzes the influence and the effects of formulaic language on EFL learners' speaking performance. Eighteen studies published since the year 2000, which showed positive and negative outcomes regarding the issue of investigation, were synthesized and analyzed. Findings showed that formulaic language plays a significant role in developing English learners' speaking skills. Subsequently, fluency is one of the major effects that the knowledge of formulaic language might bring to learners' speaking performance. Additionally, these results suggest that the availability of formulaic language can help learners add fluency to their speech, and therefore, come across as proficient speakers. The outcomes of the present research synthesis can raise awareness of the suitability of teaching and learning formulaic language and promote further investigations regarding the phenomena to ascertain a clearer standpoint.

Keywords: Formulaic language. Speaking performance. Fluency. Speaking proficiency.

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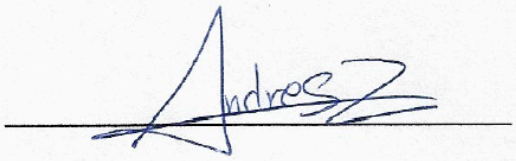

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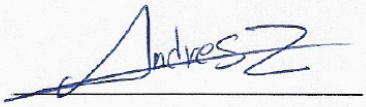

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to God, who has given me strength and bravery during this journey.

To my parents, Gustavo and Rocio, whose infinite love and support have encouraged me to accomplish my dreams.

To my sister, Leslie, who always has inspired me to do my best.

To my best friend, Michelle, who has been by my side in the toughest times.

INTRODUCTION

Formulaic language constitutes a significant proportion of the English written and spoken discourse. Accordingly, instances of formulaic language might be highly and frequently encountered in English speakers' speech. Additionally, scholars have postulated that the knowledge of formulaic language aids the speaker's performance in saving effort in processing and achieving interactional functions (Wray, 2000; Wray & Perkins, 2000) as well as in providing fluency to their speech (Brand & Götz, 2011; Pawley & Syder, 1983).

Considering the need of English language learners to achieve an appropriate command of the target language, especially regarding the speaking skill, researchers have been concerned with the influence that formulaic language might have on L2 English learners. The relationship between learners' speaking performance and formulaic language has been considerably investigated in linguistics and L2 language teaching.

Consequently, in order to examine the impact of formulaic language on EFL learners' speaking performance, this bibliographical investigation compiles, synthesizes, and analyzes primary research studies. Furthermore, this research synthesis addresses the next research questions: 1) What are the implications of the knowledge of formulaic language on the EFL learners' speaking ability? 2) What is the relationship between the knowledge of formulaic language and EFL learners' speaking fluency?

This research paper comprises six chapters. The first chapter provides a description of the research as it addresses the problem statement, rationale, and research questions. In the second chapter, the theoretical framework presents theories and concepts necessary for the understanding of the investigation. In the third chapter, the literature review synthesizes the findings of 18 primary research studies. The fourth chapter establishes the research methodology.

Subsequently, in the fifth chapter, the analysis codes and categorizes the findings of the research studies to answer the research questions. Finally, the sixth chapter encompasses the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER I

Introductory Chapter

1.1 Background

Formulaic sequences (FS), multi-word units, and chunks are equivalent terms to refer to groups of words which are retrieved or remembered as a whole and not element by element when producing the language. Nevertheless, as Wray suggested there are diverse definitions concerning formulaic language, but some authors and scholars reach agreement in that multi-word units are stored in the brain as one-piece expressions, and that they are recovered from memory in the same way (as cited in Assassi & Benyelles, 2016). For instance, Wood (2002) states that "definitions of formulaic language units refer to multi-word or multiform strings produced and recalled as a chunk, like a single lexical item, rather than being generated from individual items and rules" (p. 03).

Furthermore, formulaic sequences have some implications for language teaching regarding the speaking ability. Provided that, there are some reasons why multi-words are believed to be beneficial for learners' speech performance, especially fluency. One of them is that "since formulaic sequences are believed to be retrieved from memory holistically, i.e. as prefabricated, ready-made chunks, they are believed to facilitate fluent language production under real-time conditions" (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, & Demecheleer, 2006, p. 247).

In the English language, there are some instances of words which are constituted by more than one element. Thus, formulaic sequences might involve idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, proverbs, fixed expressions, among others. Native speakers of English tend to use these multi-word units in most of their natural speech since they may convey wider information than other groups of words which are grammatically created element by element. As for second language

learners, the use of formulaic sequences might provide naturalness to their speech since their availability is related to native-likeness.

Most language learners of any language aim to accomplish a high level of fluency and proficiency. That is to say, to communicate successfully with native speakers of the language, as well as to understand every utterance, phrase, and lexical combination that they produce. Therefore, since most parts of speech produced by native speakers are composed of formulas, it is necessary for language learners to incorporate these combinations of words into their lexicon.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Formulaic language is present in a large number of instances of natural discourse. In fact, according to Erman and Warren (2000) in their analysis of the amount of prefabricated expressions used in texts, they found that 58% of spoken language and 52% of written language is constituted of formulaic expressions. That is to say, one can expect native speakers of English to produce several word combinations when speaking and writing. Furthermore, "if much discourse is made up of formulaic language, then this implies that proficient language users know a large number of formulaic expressions" (Schmitt, 2006, p. 14).

As for English learners, when it comes to produce the language, most of them might find some difficulties. This can be attributed to that they do not find the appropriate word to express what they actually intend to express. Consequently, learners try to create phrases and group words applying grammatical or morphological rules which sometimes lead to a totally different expression from the one that they were looking for (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016). This propensity of using the incorrect word groups might give to learners' discourse a sense of unnaturalness, making their speaking sound unusual and their writing look odd. Hence, whether learners' productive skills lack of formulaic expressions, it can be assumed that the learner has not

accomplished a good level of proficiency. Moreover, as mentioned above, spoken language is constituted of a high percentage of formulaic expressions. Therefore, it is essential for learners to have a wide domain over them to add a native-like characteristic to their speech.

With this in mind, it ought to be thought whether the English we learn and teach in classrooms contains an adequate amount of these expressions which are present in native speakers' speech or whether educators even attempt to include these expressions in their teaching programs.

1.3 Rationale

As it is commonly known, grammar is the area which more attention receives when it comes to teach a language. Nevertheless, before dealing with sentence structure rules and even knowing what they are, what language learners first learn are words and prefabricated expressions. For instance, Sirkel (2017) suggested that "ready-made utterances like how are you? Where are you from? help the learner to cope with a simple conversation without yet gained the knowledge of the basic grammar rules…" (p.39). Thus, words are the basic and core element of all languages. In fact, a large repertory of vocabulary may predict the success of a learner in productive and receptive skills (Sirkel, 2017).

Currently, English is a widespread language all over the world. Important research papers of different disciplines, famous movies and songs, celebrated books, etc. are produced in English. Consequently, learners are willing to understand as much information as possible from different sources, as well as native speakers' natural oral and written messages. However, in most English classes, the vocabulary which learners are exposed to, for the most part, are isolated words. Hence, as Alqahtani (2015) suggested, "many learners see second language acquisition (SLA) as essentially a matter of learning vocabulary and therefore they spend a great

deal of time on memorizing lists of L2 words and rely on their bilingual dictionary as a basic communicative resource" (p. 23). Moreover, considering the assumption that formulaic language might aid learners' speaking ability, it ought to be considered the teaching and learning of ready-made expressions and not merely isolated words.

Provided that, in the last years, several researches have been interested in the conveniences of formulaic language for learners of English. Some authors have found that the knowledge of chunks or formulaic sequences have improved learners' speaking ability. For instance, McGuire and Larson-Hall (2017) discovered that by giving special attention to formulaic sequences in the classroom, students might benefit of using them, improving their speaking ability. Similarly, Rafieyan (2018) found that learners who had a large repertory of target formulaic sequences demonstrated a higher level of language proficiency than those who had little knowledge of formulaic sequences.

Lastly, despite the assumption that formulaic language is favorable for learners of English whether in an EFL or ESL context, it has not received much attention in the field of language teaching. Therefore, this research synthesis is important to be conducted to raise awareness among English teachers and learners of the suitability and benefits that formulaic language might bring to the English classroom.

1.4 Research Questions

After reviewing the relevant information in the given field, the following questions have arisen:

What are the implications of the knowledge of formulaic language on the EFL learners' speaking ability?

What is the relationship between the knowledge of formulaic language and EFL learners' speaking fluency?

1.5 General Objectives

To analyze whether the knowledge of formulaic language influences EFL learners' speaking performance, according to the existing empirical evidence.

1.6 Specific Objectives

To identify to what extend formulaic language impacts on EFL learners' speaking performance, according to what is reported in the pertinent literature.

To describe the benefits of formulaic language to EFL learners' speaking fluency, as reported in the existing literature in the topic.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses theories, concepts, and perspectives compulsory to understand what formulaic language is and how it might influence EFL learners' speaking performance. Consequently, this chapter is divided into 3 sections: (a) defines formulaic language and its main characteristics, (b) establishes differences between L1 and L2 acquisition and learning as well as differences between ESL and EFL learning contexts, (c) defines the speaking skill and provides insight on language proficiency and communicative competence.

2.2 Fundamentals and Characteristics of Formulaic Language

The first term to be defined in this section is formulaic language. Several authors have attempted to define formulaic language, but currently there is still no general or accepted definition. Hence, multiple definitions are encountered in the literature. For instance, Pawley and Syder (1983) define formulaic language as "a unit of clause length or longer whose grammatical form and lexical content is wholly or largely fixed" (p. 191). Similarly, Myles, Hooper, and Mitchell (1998) assert that definitions of formulaic language "embrace the notion of a multi-morphemic unit memorized and recalled as a whole, rather than generated from individual items based on linguistic rules" (p. 325).

Additionally, a definition that has been widely embraced by scholars due to its inclusiveness is that of Wray and Perkins (2000). They define formulaic language as

> a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other 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. (p.9)

Nevertheless, definitions of formulaic language, although presenting slightly variations, seem to coincide with the notion that formulaic language is constituted of multiword units, with a single denotation, stored in memory and recalled as one single element (Wood, 2015).

Just as formulaic language presents various definitions, so there are several terms to name it. A thorough classification of the terminology used to regard formulaic language in literature is reported by Wray (2002). The author lists around 50 terms used to describe these multiword constructions. Some of the terms present in the categorization are: *formulaic sequences, lexical bundles, chunks, set phrases, preassembled speech, ready-made expressions, lexicalized sentence stem,* among others.

Similarly, instances of formulaic language can be classified in diverse categories such as phrasal verbs (calm down), collocations (fast food), idioms (raining cats and dogs), fillers (you know), proverbs (actions speak louder than words), binomials (pros and cons), discourse markers (not so long ago), compounds (bookcase), and transitions (on the other hand). Although these instances of formulaic language stand among the most common found in literature, the classification might be extensive. Nevertheless, an exact system to determine what utterances are formulaic and non-formulaic has not yet been identified, mainly due to its complexity. In Wray's (2000) view, formulaic and non-formulaic language might look alike, and a method to identify it can be its frequency of occurrence. However, frequency cannot be the only single criterion for identification. According to Wood (2015), a combination of the most common measures, for instance: frequency and statistical measures, phonological characteristics, and native speaker judgment may assist to recognize instances of formulaic language.

Bearing the definitions and categories in mind, it is worth mentioning that formulaic language may not permanently be fixed sequences, and that on some occasions it may involve

syntactic or grammatical analysis allowing substitution or transformation. As Read and Nation (2004) observe, the idiom *pull someone's leg* can allow substitution regarding the case of the pronoun as in *pull his leg*, pull *their leg*. Similarly, transformation can be seen in the phrase *chew the fat* as in *fat-chewing*, *fat-chewers*. Even though this is the case of idioms, other instances of formulaic language might not allow such modifications.

2.3 Roles of Formulaic Language in the English Language

From a corpus linguistic perspective, formulaic language seems to play an important role in the English spoken and written discourse. As a matter of fact, Erman and Warren (2000), in a corpus analysis, estimate that prefabricated expressions constitute a high proportion of spoken and written English; around 55% of the English language found in texts stands formulaic. This suggests that formulaic expressions might be highly and frequently encountered in speech, and that speakers tend to return to use them, whenever possible, rather than producing novel utterances.

The speakers' perception deciding whether to generate novel utterances or to recur to prefabricated expressions might be explained by Sinclair's (1991) idiom principle and open-choice principle. The former explains that "a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments" (Sinclair, 1991, p. 110). Conversely, the latter describes language as the result of an extensive number of complex choices (individual words), only constrained by the language grammar. Sinclair's (1991) principles provide insight for the present project since they raise awareness regarding the assumption that not all language production entails the exercise of linguistic rules, and that prefabricated expressions are not excluded features of language. Along with the abovementioned author, Pawley and Syder (1983) also

comment on the extent to which speakers tend to recall prefabricated expressions. The authors suggest that native speakers do not fully apply the power of grammatical creativeness to generate novel language, and that such action is considered a characteristic of native-like control of the language.

2.3.1 Functions of Formulaic Language in Speaking

An equally important aspect of formulaic language is how it might influence the act of speaking. For instance, Schmitt (2010) remarks that formulaic language is linked to basic functions of language use as it facilitates language production and comprehension reducing the cognitive load that the act of speaking requires. Indeed, a detailed model of the functions of formulaic language is suggested by Wray (2000) and Wray and Perkins (2000). According to the authors, formulaic language may aid speakers to save effort in processing and achieving interactional functions. The authors further suggest, on one hand, that when a speaker uses an instance of formulaic language in order to save effort in processing, the objective is to produce fluent speech and to avoid any interruptions in the message. On the other hand, when using formulaic language to achieve interactional functions, the speaker is concerned with the effect that the utterances may have on the hearer.

Furthermore, besides formulaic language influencing the speaker, it seems to have certain effects, at least at some extend, on the hearer as well. Wray (2000) adds a model that interconnects the two aforementioned functions. She remarks that formulaic language benefits the speaker by aiding the speaker's production in manipulating information, buying time for processing, creating a shorter processing route, organizing, and signaling the organization of a discourse. Subsequently, formulaic language aids the hearer's comprehension in organizing and signaling the organization of a discourse, getting the hearer to do two things: manipulation of the

speaker's world and identification of the speaker's individual identity and the speaker's group identity. In brief, the availability of formulaic language in one's lexicon might facilitate the act of speaking since it assists language production and comprehension; that is, reducing cognitive load, giving the speaker time to process what is intended to say, and getting the hearer to comprehend the message.

2.4 Formulaic Language on ESL and EFL Learners

So far, this chapter has focused on the main characteristics of formulaic language. The following section provides insight regarding English language learners and formulaic language. Consequently, terms including first language and second language acquisition, and English language learning contexts are covered.

First language (L1) refers to a person's mother tongue, native or first acquired language. Conversely, second language (L2) regards other language than a person's native or mother tongue, being studied or learned (Mizza, 2014). Nevertheless, although L1 and L2 subjects might be acquiring the same language (e.g. English), there are some crucial differences between them. For instance, children acquiring their first language are also involved in learning about how the world works (MacWhinney, 2008). Contrarily, second language learners, having existing knowledge of the world, learn new ways (new language) to talk about the world (Chenu & Jisa, 2009).

Besides L1 and L2 general differences, it is worth comparing the terms acquisition and learning as well. According to Oxford (1990), acquisition encompasses an unconscious process in which language develops from a naturalistic environment. In contrast, learning is the conscious knowledge of a language being the result of formal instruction. Additionally, the author mentions that the distinction between acquisition and learning is too strict, and that both

terms are likely to be integrated aspects for developing language skills. Consequently, regardless of the contrast between acquisition and learning, for the present research synthesis both terms are used interchangeably when referring to learning a language.

Turning now to L1 and L2 acquisition of formulaic language, some differences can be accounted. According to Wood (2002), L1 and L2 learners seem to acquire formulaic sequences differently. Children appear to use formulaic sequences as a learning strategy firstly adopting them from input and lastly segmenting and analyzing them. In contrast, adults seem to use formulaic language as a production strategy in order to reduce effort and attention in spontaneous communication. The notion that adults are less likely to use formulaic language as a learning strategy and benefit from it might be, because adults are less likely to analyze and segment target formulaic language due to their existing conceptual knowledge (Arnon & Christiansen, 2016).

2.5 EFL and ESL Learners

Although the research synthesis concentrates mainly on learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), it is convenient to acknowledge its difference from a context where English is learned as a second language (ESL), because on some occasions the term second language is generally used to regard both learning contexts without establishing its boundaries.

In an EFL context, English is studied in an environment where the language is not used on an everyday basis, and interaction and input are limited. Conversely, in an English as a second language context, English is the primary vehicle for everyday communication in which input to the target language is abundant (Oxford, 2003). Although in both EFL and ESL learning contexts learners receive exposure to the target language, the amount of input varies between them. EFL learners, unlike ESL learners, have limited access to language input and less opportunities for practicing which might hinder their learning process.

Regarding formulaic language, EFL learners' opportunities to encounter instances of formulaic language are usually insufficient for learning due to their limited exposure to the target language (Lenko-Szymaska, 2014). Nonetheless, exposure is not the only challenge learners of English might experience when acquiring formulaic language. According to Ma (2009), the acquisition of target formulaic language is quite problematic due to several factors: a) language learners tend to transfer their L1 formulaic language knowledge which could lead to overuse or underuse of the target formulaic language, b) usually the meaning of formulaic language cannot be derived from the analysis of its component words challenging its acquisition; the only way to learn it is as a sequence, c) prefabricated language could be misused or overused if a balance between formulaic language and creative language is not acknowledged, d) formulaic language is rarely incorporated in teaching materials, and teachers' input of formulaic language in the classroom might be absent if they are not native speakers of the language.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that may prevent EFL learners from learning formulaic language with ease, scholars such as Michel Lewis (1993) have attempted to draw attention to pedagogical approaches focused on teaching formulaic language. Lewis' (1993) lexical approach remarks the importance of incorporating lexical phrases to the teaching of foreign languages. The author emphasizes that a primary element of language teaching is to raise students' awareness of, and develop their capacity to chuck the language, for which he further suggests classroom activities, such as 'noticing' to assist learning.

2.6 The Speaking Skill

Turning now to the final section of this chapter, essential features of the speaking skill, oral proficiency, and communicative competence are discussed to comprehend the relation between formulaic language and speaking performance.

Speaking is an activity all humans perform in order to express ideas and messages to others. As a matter of fact, speaking is considered a complex activity since it requires the coordination of several cognitive processes and muscles of speech production (Walczak, 2018). Moreover, in a language teaching context, speaking is defined as "the productive aural/oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning" (Bailey, 2003, p. 48). Developing learners' speaking skills may be an arduous task considering all the features that it involves. In consequence, mastering the ability of speaking is considered the foremost feature of learning a second or foreign language (Nunan, 1991).

The act of speaking is characterized by three main areas of knowledge: mechanics, functions, and social and cultural norms and rules. According to Erdönmez (2014), mechanics includes the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in which common lexical phrases, expressive devices, and features of connected speech are also required. Subsequently, functions of the language consist of the knowledge of using language in different contexts and for different purposes. That is to say, speakers need to know how to negotiate the language (e.g. asking for clarification and giving information), in which fixed phrases might help speakers to clarify the message. Finally, the latter requires speakers to be acquainted with conversational rules and structures (e.g. turn-taking) and conversational strategies (e.g. fillers). As long as formulaic language is concerned, it seems that a certain number of speaking features might involve the application of instances of formulaic language, at least at some extent.

2.7 Speaking Subskills

Along with the areas of knowledge that the act of speaking entails, there are sub-skills of speaking that learners have to develop in order to perform successfully, namely fluency and accuracy. According to Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005), fluency is characterized by

speaking at a normal rate and by the absence of repetitions, self-corrections, and hesitation; whereas, accuracy involves the correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Although the speaking skill entails both sub-skills fluency and accuracy, the paper concentrates mostly on fluency.

In an EFL learning context, according to Lennon (1990), the term fluency might be used in a broad and narrow sense. When remarking the broad sense, fluency might be used as a cover term for oral proficiency in which being fluent is considered as having the highest degree of command of a foreign language. Meanwhile, in its narrow sense, fluency appears to be a separate component of oral proficiency which is particular in methods for oral examinations.

Moreover, regarding formulaic language, it has often been linked with fluency due to its characteristic of not requiring extensive retrieving effort and planning (Brand & Götz, 2011). Indeed, researchers such as Pawley and Syder (1983), remark that memorized prefabricated expressions need little processing effort, and that such phrases are characteristically of the fluent discourse.

2.8 Language Proficiency and Communicative Competence

The mastering of a language might be an arduous journey since it entails several areas of knowledge. Generally, when a learner's degree of mastering of a language is significant, he or she might be labeled as a proficient user of the language. Nevertheless, proficiency is a difficult term to define since its constituents and its measuring criteria are still issues of debate (Benatti, 2013). According to Harsch (2017), in EFL or ESL learning contexts, proficiency involves "being able to do something with the language ('knowing how') as well as knowing about it ('knowing what')" (p.250). Furthermore, according to the Council of Europe (2001), proficiency is measured under the notion of "what someone can do/knows in relation to the application of the

subject in the real world" (p.181). Learners' ability to use the language successfully in different contexts and for different purposes might determine whether they are proficient users of the language or not. Regarding speaking proficiency, a learner might be labeled as a proficient speaker when he or she has a great command of the usual components of speaking proficiency, which according to Bahrani and Soltani (2011) can be vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, accent, and communication.

Additionally, the term proficiency is usually related to communicative competence (Benatti, 2013). As Ingram and Wylie (1992) suggest, "communicative competence is used both rigorously in ways that differ little from language proficiency and loosely to mean the ability to communicate" (p. 31). This might be because communicative competence also entails the command of different areas of knowledge in order to perform successfully while using the language, as proficiency does. Canale (1983) remarks that communicative competence involves different areas of knowledge and skills such as grammatical competence (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), sociolinguistic competence (socio-cultural rules and rules of discourse), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence in speech), and strategic competence (verbal and non-verbal communication strategies).

2.9 Conclusion

Throughout this section, multiple theories, concepts, and perspectives from different authors have been accounted in order to provide a standpoint regarding formulaic language and EFL learners' speaking performance. This theoretical framework is considered crucial as it contributes to the understanding of the present investigation. Furthermore, it will assist the researcher in the development of subsequent sections.

CHAPTER III

Literature Review

The following chapter addresses relevant findings and brief descriptions of the studies analyzed. The overall data collected was synthesized and divided into five sections: a) formulaic language in natural discourse, b) formulaic language and speaking fluency, c) formulaic language and language proficiency, d) formulaic language and language teaching, and e) formulaic language and ESL learners.

3.1 Formulaic Language in Natural Discourse

Formulaic language is present in a large number of instances of natural discourse. Formulaic sequences and multi-word constructions are more frequently remembered and uttered than single word constructions in which learners create novel phrases or sentences applying grammatical rules.

Erman and Warren (2000) conducted a corpus analysis to study the impact that prefabricated language had on the production and structure of texts (written and spoken). They analyzed 19 extracts from three corpora databases, namely The London Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC), Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen corpus (LOB), and Goldilocks. Findings primarily showed that pre-fabricated expressions occurred in spoken and written registers at an average of 55%. Moreover, researchers remarked that spoken registers exhibited a greater proportion of prefabricated language (58,6%) than written registers (52,3%). Nevertheless, the authors pointed out that their findings and statistical results should be taken as approximations. Additionally, researchers suggested that since prefabricated expressions are abundant in the English discourse, teaching material could probably implement these expressions to better represent nativelike use

of the language, which might improve students' learning strategies and command of a foreign language.

In line with the abovementioned corpus analysis, Biber, Conrad, and Cortes (2004) investigated the use of lexical bundles in university classroom teaching and textbooks. Various registers related to academic life were selected for the examination (classroom teaching, office hours, study groups) as well as textbooks from different disciplines (Business, Education, Engineering, Humanities). Samples were taken from the TOEFL 2000 Spoken and Written Academic Language (T2K-SWAL) Corpus. Results showed that lexical bundles occurred at a high rate of frequency in classroom teaching (8,000 times per 1 million words) and in textbooks (2,500 times per 1 million words).

As presented above, formulaic language predicts a high percentage of the English natural discourse whether spoken or written. Hence, due to the significant level of frequency which formulaic sequences arise with, it is plausible to say that native speakers of English tend to choose these prefabricated expressions when producing the language rather than building them up. Additionally, since a person's natural language might be characterized by the availability of certain word combinations, as for learners of English when exposed to natural input, they might encounter complications if knowledge of formulaic language is limited.

3.2 Formulaic Sequences, Chunks, and Speaking Fluency

Raised awareness of the important role that formulaic language plays on the English spoken and written discourse, scholars have concentrated on the relationship between formulaic language and learners' speaking ability. Particularly, several researchers have attempted to investigate how formulaic language might influence EFL learners' speaking fluency.

For instance, Khodadady and Shamsaee (2012), aimed to investigate the types of formulaic language more frequently used by language learners and whether there was any relationship between the frequency of use of formulaic sequences and learners' speaking ability. Therefore, 41 university students majoring in TEFL and Translation took part in the investigation. An IELTS speaking specimen adapted by the researcher was used to collect data. Participants were individually interviewed and recorded, and subsequently, their recordings were explored in search of instances of formulaic sequences. Findings showed that the most frequent types of formulaic sequences used by the participants were collocations. However, there was no significant relationship between the frequency of collocations and the participants' level of speaking proficiency. The researchers explained that this might be because the use of such type of formulae occurs more among less proficient learners. Conversely, transitions and personal stance makers were the only types of formulaic sequences that showed a significant relationship with participants' speech fluency and their overall speaking ability.

However, these findings of collocations as not being a key contributor to the development of learners' speaking proficiency are contradictory to Movahediyn-Attar, and Allami's (2013) study results. The researchers aimed to explore whether teaching collocations had any significant effect on the speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners. After the experiment, it was determined that teaching collocations had a significant and positive effect on the participants' speaking proficiency as it helped learners add fluency and a native-like characteristic to their speech. Nevertheless, the researchers remarked that their study was carried out with a small number of participants (40 EFL students) and that there was lack of literature to compare their study with.

Other authors concerned with formulaic language and its effects on EFL learners' speaking performance were Üstünbaş and Ortaçtepe (2016), who sought to study the use of

formulaic language of EFL learners in multi-oral tasks, the type of task in which learners use more instances of formulaic language, and whether the use of formulaic sequences is related to their fluency. As for the former aim, examiners conducted a content analysis of the textbook and video recordings of 190 EFL learners. The examination showed that the book (Touchstone by Cambridge) contained 228 different formulaic expressions with the frequency of 2,083. Students used 134 of them with the frequency of 1,298. Furthermore, concerning the second aim, oral proficiency exams were studied. The exams consisted of two parts; picture description (individually) and a communicative role-play (peer-task). The results showed that the task type in which learners used formulaic sequences more frequently was in the paired task; specifically, 68% of the overall use of formulaic sequences took place in the paired task. As for the latter aim, a correlation test between formulaic language use and fluency was conducted. The results of the correlation showed a significant relationship between students' formulaic language use and their fluency scores. Researchers interpreted the last result as indicating that the more formulaic language the learners used, the higher were their fluency scores. Moreover, examiners suggested further research on whether formulaic language is taught by classroom teachers considering the need for learners to come across as fluent speakers. Besides, they suggested that formulaic language should be part of language programs since it helps learners' fluency development.

Similarly, Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015) found that there was a significant relationship between the use of chunks and Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency due to the type of instruction they were exposed to, which was focused on chunks. Additionally, the authors also suggested that teachers, learners, and material developers are requested to consider the conveniences of chunks in English language teaching contexts. Nevertheless, even though numerous studies have shown a direct correspondence between the two variables, it is not always

the case. For instance, Afzali (2015) determined that instruction on formulaic sequences had no significant impact on EFL learners' speaking fluency since there was no significant increase in participants' fluency from pre-test to post-test. Moreover, the researcher highlighted that the study population was small (34 EFL learners) and that limited research has been conducted to examine the association between formulaic language and its effectiveness on speaking fluency.

3.3 Formulaic Language and Language Proficiency

The knowledge of formulaic language has not only been reported to be beneficial to EFL learners' speaking fluency, but learners' speaking proficiency as well.

Rafieyan (2018) conducted a study to investigate whether there was any relationship between the knowledge of formulaic sequences and language proficiency. The researcher outlined that a high rate of formulaic sequences in language played a vital role in EFL learners' speech fluency and language proficiency. Therefore, this study was conducted with 45 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language at three different levels of language proficiency, namely low-intermediate, intermediate, and high-intermediate. An oral-production discourse completion task (DCT) was used to collect data. Findings showed that knowledge of target formulaic sequences increased with proficiency levels. Low-intermediate learners displayed the lowest knowledge. Subsequently, intermediate learners outperformed the latter, though their performance seemed overshadowed by high-intermediate learners. Consequently, the analysis showed a positive relationship between the two variables, knowledge of formulaic sequences and language proficiency.

These results tie well with Shen's (2015) study about the functions of chunk input on English students' oral production. A Total of 60 EFL Chinese learners were selected for the experiment and later divided into control and experimental groups. The experiment consisted of

four stages. First, learners become aware of chunks and what they could represent for their learning. Second, learners were asked to practice chunk recognition in their study coursebook. Subsequently, they were expected to accumulate a range of new vocabulary based on chunks. Finally, learners were asked to apply chunks to real contexts. After instruction, students' pre-tests and post-tests were compared to determine whether there was a significant improvement in students' oral production. Results showed that the speaking proficiency of learners who were exposed to chunk input was significantly different from that of learners who had no chunk exposure. The researcher interpreted this finding as a positive correlation between chunks and English learners' oral proficiency.

Similarly, Assassi and Benyelles (2016) investigated the hypothesis that formulaicity helped EFL learners reach fluency and be communicatively competent. Researchers selected a quasi-experiment strategy for conducting the study and chose 15 first-year Master on English Language students due to their significant knowledge of formulaicity. Pre-test and post-tests were provided for the experimental group. The experiment consisted of three phases: in phase number one, students were tested about general knowledge of formulaic language (pre-test). Subsequently, in phase number two, students were exposed to formulaic input, and lastly, students took the post-test. In pre-tests, results showed a low frequency of formulaic expressions. Nevertheless, in post-tests, students' scores were higher, confirming that the knowledge of formulaic sequences helped learners reach fluency to construct a solid communicative competence.

Other researchers have also explored whether the type of target language influences the relationship between formulaic sequences and L2 oral proficiency. That is to say, Stengers, et al. (2011) examined whether L1 Dutch learners' oral production of formulaic sequences presented a

greater challenge in the case of L2 Spanish than L2 English. This study was conducted with 60 Dutch-speaking students of modern languages (26 majoring in English and 34 majoring in Spanish). The participants were given a re-tell task and their performance was recorded for further analysis. Findings primarily showed that even though formulaic-sequences counts and oral proficiency scores were positively correlated in both target languages, the correlation for L2 English was stronger than for L2 Spanish. The researchers suggested that these results might be due to the inflectional properties of Spanish, which are greater than those of English. Therefore, it is more difficult for Spanish learners to produce grammatically correct formulaic sequences than for English learners. The researchers concluded that there was a significant and strong relationship between L2 English learners' oral proficiency and formulaic sequences.

3.4 Formulaic Language and Language Teaching

Besides the assumption that formulaic language can help EFL learners develop fluency and be perceived as proficient speakers, researches have also been concerned with the way formulaic language is taught.

Mohammadi and Enayati (2018) aimed to study the effects of learning lexical chunks on the speaking fluency of 60 EFL Iranian learners. For the study, teaching on lexical chunks was implemented as an extracurricular activity (explicit teaching). The researchers used an experimental design for the study, hence experimental and control groups were selected. During the treatment, participants in the experimental group were asked to use lexical chunks, specifically collocations, and wrote several paragraphs about different topics. Later, they had to present their writings to the class by using lexical chucks in their conversations. The researchers used a pre-test, a post-test, and an interview to measure the knowledge of formulaic sequences. Results indicated that lexical chunk instruction could bring a significant improvement in the

fluency of the learners in the experimental group. Researchers pointed out that the development of fluency was due to the type of instruction and a large number of lexical bundles that learners were exposed to. Additionally, researchers also remarked that since the instruction was focused on writing, it developed students' writing fluency as well, though it was not discussed in the study.

Along with the two previously mentioned authors, Boers et al, (2006) were also concerned with the teaching of formulaic language. Consequently, in their study, they hypothesized that an instructional method that emphasizes 'noticing' of L2 formulaic sequences could help learners add such phrases to their repertory and thus contribute to their oral proficiency. As a result, 32 students majoring in English in a college in Brussels took part in the experiment. Instruction consisted of 22 hours of teaching spread over an eight-month period. After instruction, it was noticed that students in the experimental group tended to use more formulaic sequences than the control group. Additionally, a significant correlation between formulaic sequences and learners' proficiency scores suggested that formulaic sequences indeed played a significant role in students coming across as proficient speakers. An instructional method based on 'phrase noticing' was considered of significant influence.

Comparably, Thomson (2017) explored the effectiveness of a fluency workshop based on multi-word expressions. This fluency workshop was conducted with 73 EFL students in a university in Japan and consisted of six weeks of instruction. The participants performed a variety of speaking activities such as role-play and shadowing. After instruction, the researcher concluded that there was a positive correlation between the learners' speaking fluency and the use of multi-word expressions, though the correlation fell short of significance. Subsequently,

the researcher suggested further investigation with more participants to compare the effects of the fluency workshop more statistically.

3.5 Formulaic Language and ESL Learners

Although this research synthesis concentrates mainly on EFL learners, it is worth comparing the studies conducted on an ESL context for a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

McGuire and Larson-Hall (2017), studied the hypothesis that teaching formulaic sequences explicitly to ESL learners might improve their speaking fluency. In this experimental study, the treatment group was exposed to vocabulary primarily related to formulaic language, while the control group, was exposed to traditional vocabulary. After instruction, the treatment group improved from the pre-test to the post-test and exceeded the control group in speaking fluency scores. Researchers concluded that the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences helped learners increase their speaking fluency. Moreover, the authors pointed out that since the students were living in the United States, and therefore having intensive contact with the target language, improvements in their formulaic language use and fluency were expected due to the abroad experience.

Comparably, Wood (2006), in his study regarding the uses and functions of formulaic sequences in the development of ESL learners' speaking ability, found that formulaic sequences played an important role in the development of the learners' fluency since participants used formulaic language in a variety of forms allowing them to increase their speech fluency. Furthermore, Wood (2007), in a longitudinal study with a smaller number of participants, further confirmed that the learners showed a trend towards increased fluency. The researcher remarked that there was not a firm set of empirical or theoretical knowledge in the literature to guide the

interpretation of the results. Later on, in a case study, Wood (2009) explored the effects of focused instruction of formulaic sequences on the speaking performance of an ESL learner. After instruction, the researcher concluded that there were strong gains in the participant's use of formulaic sequences and speaking fluency. Nevertheless, the researcher highlighted that it was unclear to determine to what extend the instruction of formulaic sequences increased the learner's fluency since it can be ascribed to extensive contact with the target language in an ESL context.

3.6 Conclusion

Formulaic language seems to play a considerable role in the English written and spoken discourse. Since it is widely spread on these two registers, researchers have been concerned with the effects it might bring to L2 learners. Research has attempted to show how formulaic language might aid or improve learners' speaking performance. Additionally, there has also been concerned with the way formulaic sequences have been taught in L2 classrooms. Overall research on formulaic language has been concerned with the outcomes that formulaic language may bring to L2 learners' speaking performance.

CHAPTER IV

Methodology

This research synthesis was an exploratory investigation of bibliographical character since, according to Norris and Ortega (2006), an "exploratory bibliographic research is the systematic secondary review of accumulated primary research studies" (p. 4). Consequently, in order to collect reliable literature for this project, the information was searched in online databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, EBSCO, Academia, ERIC, Taylor & Francis, and Elsevier. The inclusion criteria considered for the present review were: 1) empirical and theoretical studies, 2) articles that were published no further back than the year 2000 so that the review can be considered relevant, 3) studies which have shown positive or negative results concerning formulaic language, 4) studies which have been conducted in the field of ESL and EFL. Furthermore, the terms for searching were the following: (a) effects, (b) benefits, (c) teaching, (d) knowledge, (e) chunks, (g) formulaic sequences, (h) lexical-bundles, (i) speaking ability, (j) fluency. In addition, there were no restrictions concerning the design of the studies. Hence, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods were taken into account. Moreover, the exclusion criteria considered for the investigation were: 1) unpublished studies, 2) non-peer-reviewed studies, 3) studies from secondary sources.

Moreover, based on preliminary research, some journals such as *The Canadian Modern Language Review, International Journal of Instruction, International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, Arab World English Journal*, among others were revised since many relevant studies were found in those sources (Annex 1). Lastly, a coding process to classify the studies according to different criteria emerged through the analysis.

CHAPTER V

Analysis

5.1 Introduction

For the present research synthesis, 18 studies were selected for the analysis which is aimed to answer the research questions. Subsequently, as the studies were analyzed, different categories for classification arose. These categories were the year of publication of the studies, research focus, research approach used to collect data, effects of formulaic language on learners' speaking performance, and the relationship between formulaic language and learners' speaking fluency. Additionally, the findings were presented in tables and lastly described.

5.2 Year of Publication of the Studies

Table 1

Year of Publication of the Studies

Year of publication	Nº of Studies	Author/Year
2000 - 2004	2	Erman & Warren (2000); Biber, Conrad & Cortes (2004)
2005 - 2009	4	Boers et al. (2006); Wood (2006); Wood (2007); Wood (2009)
2010 – 2014	3	Stengers et al. (2011); Khodadady & Shamsaee (2012); Movahediyan-Attar & Allami (2013);
2015 - 2019	9	Shen (2015); Afzali (2015); Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015); Assassi & Benyelles (2016); Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); McGuire & Larson-Hall (2017); Thomson (2017); Rafieyan (2018); Mohammadi & Enayati (2018)

Note. N= 18

Table 1 presents the year of publication of the studies from a range of 19 years. The earliest studies were corpus analyses aimed to investigate the impact, rate, and use that formulaic language had on the spoken and written English discourse. Results showed that formulaic

language played a significant role on the production of spoken and written English. For the subsequent years, studies were aimed to examine the effects and relationship between formulaic language and learners' speaking performance.

As shown in Table 1, most of the studies were conducted in the last nine years. It is assumed from the results of this table that it has been until recently that formulaic language has received considerable attention in research areas such as L2 language learning and teaching. Additionally, in the last four years, nine studies were conducted. This suggests that concern is increasing among researchers regarding the effects that formulaic language might bring to L2 learners' speaking performance.

5.3 Research Focus

Table 2

Research Focus

Focus	Nº of Studies	Author/Year
Effects of Teaching Formulaic Language on Speaking Performance	10	Assassi & Benyelles (2016); Boers et at. (2006); McGuire & Larson-Hall (2017); Mohammadi & Enayati (2018); Shen (2015); Afzali (2015); Movahediyan-Attar & Allami (2013); Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015); Wood (2009); Thomson (2017)
Effects of the knowledge of Formulaic Language and Speaking Performance	6	Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); Khodadady & Shamsaee (2012); Rafieyan (2018), Wood (2006), Wood (2007); Stengers et al. (2011)
Rate of Formulaic Language on Spoken and Written Registers	2[a]	Erman & Warren (2000); Biber, Conrad & Cortes (2004)

Note. N= 18

[a] Corpus analyses

Table 2 compares the research focus of the studies analyzed. There were three categories which reported a) the effects of teaching formulaic language, b) effects of its knowledge, and c)

the proportion it had in the English discourse. In the first category, researchers exposed learners to target formulaic language and used different approaches and strategies to teach it. In the second category, researchers assessed learners' knowledge of formulaic language and further linked it with their speaking performance. Conversely, in the last category, research was based on the rate and frequency that formulaic language had in written and spoken registers.

The area of research which more attention has received regarding the issue of investigation was the effects of teaching formulaic language on speaking performance. Erman and Warren (2000), in their corpus analysis, suggested that their findings could raise awareness of the high rate and importance of prefabs to improve foreign language learning strategies as well as their adaptation to teaching materials. What seems suitable to say is that researchers are interested in formulaic language as an important feature of language somehow adaptable on teaching programs due to the results it might bring to L2 learners, particularly in ELF contexts (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018).

Nevertheless, although there are numerous studies dealing with language teaching and formulaic language, there is still call for further research in aspects of accurate learning strategies, teaching methods and materials, and syllabus design (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016; Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012). In brief, overall topics of research are mainly concerned with the outcomes that L2 learners' speaking performance might have when formulaic language is available in their lexicon.

5.4 Research Approach

Table 3

Research Approach

Approach	Nº of Studies [a]	Author/Year
Quantitative	14	Boers et al. (2006); Wood (2009); Stengers et al. (2011); Khodadady & Shamsaee (2012); Movahediyan-Attar & Allami (2013); Shen (2015); Afzali (2015); Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015); Assassi & Benyelles (2016); Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); McGuire & Larson-Hall (2017); Thomson (2017); Rafieyan (2018); Mohammadi & Enayati (2018)
Qualitative	None	
Mixed-methods	2	Wood (2006); Wood (2007) *

Note. N= 16

[a] the two corpus analyses were excluded due to their research focus (Table 2).

*longitudinal study of (Wood, 2007).

Table 3 shows that 14 of 16 studies used a quantitative approach to collect data, and the remaining two adopted a mixed approach. Nevertheless, there were not any studies which used a qualitative approach only. What stands out of this table is the number of studies which used a quantitative approach. This might be because most studies attempted to demonstrate whether there was any effect or relationship between formulaic language and learners' speaking ability. For instance, Assassi and Benyelles (2016) adopted a quantitative approach since, as they reported, it helps in drawing a link between the research variables and the degree of the effect, although purely numerical.

Likewise, Boers et al. (2006) and Stengers et al. (2011) used a quantitative approach; however, they suggested that a more qualitative method, although complex, would help to really estimate the association of formulaic language and learners' oral performance. Although there is

plenty of research regarding the relationship of formulaic language and speaking ability, further research might concentrate not only in the relationship, but also in the functions of formulaic language and how learners use them while speaking (e.g., Wood, 2006).

5.5 Effects of Formulaic Language on Learners' Speaking Performance

Table 4

Effects of Formulaic Language on Learners' Speaking Performance

Effects	Nº of Studies [a] [b]	Author/Year
Oral Proficiency	6	Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); Boers et al. (2006); Rafieyan (2018); Shen (2015); Stengers et al. (2011); Movahediyan-Attar & Allami (2013)
Fluency	14	Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); Assassi & Benyelles (2016); Boers et al. (2006); Khodadady & Shamsaee (2012); McGuire & Larson-Hall (2017); Mohammadi & Enayati (2018); Wood (2006); Wood (2007); Shen (2015); Stengers et al. (2011); Afzali (2015); Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015); Wood (2009); Thomson (2017)
Communicative Competence	1	Assassi & Benyelles (2016)

Note. N= 16

[a] the two corpus analyses were excluded due to their research focus (Table 2).

[b] Studies fall in more than one category.

Table 4 presents the overall effects associated with formulaic language and learners' speaking performance considering two research focuses: effects of teaching formulaic language and effects of the knowledge of formulaic language. This was considered since, as explained in table 2, the last category is mainly concerned with the rate and frequency of formulaic language in corpora. Therefore, based on the consideration, oral proficiency, fluency, and communicative competence were the three reported effects associated with the phenomenon. In this section,

overall effects were analyzed since one of the research questions is concerned with the implications that formulaic language might bring to L2 learners' speaking ability.

Table 4 shows that researchers are highly and mostly interested in the outcomes that formulaic language might bring to learners' fluency. That is to say, the majority of studies attempted to answer the question whether formulaic language could develop, aid, or improve learners' fluency. For instance, Thomson (2017) claimed that instruction on formulaic language along with varied speaking activities for practicing may increase learners' use of formulaic expressions, and therefore, their fluency. Subsequently, he found that after instruction and practice, learners' productive knowledge of target multiword expressions increased as well as their fluency scores. In the same way, Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015) reported that learners who used more chunks while performing speaking activities were perceived as fluent speakers by evaluators. The more the learners used chunks in their speech, the more fluent they were considered.

Furthermore, besides reporting that formulaic language use increases along with fluency scores, some researchers took a further step and associated formulaic language use, fluency, and oral proficiency. This is the case of Boers et al. (2006), who showed that formulaic sequences might play an important role in students' coming across as proficient speakers. They reported that learners were perceived as proficient speakers due to their fluency in speech which was highly marked by formulaic expressions. Similarly, Rafieyan (2018), analyzing a set of oral-production discourse completion tasks, determined that learners' proficiency level increased with the knowledge of target formulaic sequences. Learners with a low-intermediate level showed the lowest knowledge. On the other hand, learners with a high-intermediate level showed the highest

knowledge. He concluded that as knowledge of formulaic sequences increases so does the level of language proficiency.

In the case of communicative competence, Assassi and Beyelles (2016) also reported fluency as being one of the main contributors to their final outcome. In their study, their treatment group showed a great deal of improvement in the acquisition of formulaic expressions which, as they noticed, helped them add fluency to their accuracy to construct a solid communicative competence.

From what has been reported, it can be said that fluency is the major effect that the availability of formulaic language can offer to learners' speaking ability. Learners' oral proficiency seems to be affected as well, although in cases complemented by fluency. Nevertheless, since only one study reported communicative competence as an effect of formulaic language, it cannot be taken as a significant effect for obvious reasons. It is somehow surprising that from all the studies found and analyzed, only three effects could be accounted. Possibly as some researchers suggested (Boers et al., 2006 & Stengers et al., 2011), research on formulaic language and learners speaking performance should incorporate a more qualitative approach to really estimate the association between the two variables.

5.6 Relationship between Formulaic Language and Learners' Speaking Fluency

Table 5

Relationship between Formulaic Language and Learners' Speaking Fluency

Relationship	Nº of Studies [a] [b]	Author/Year
Significant	7	Üstünbaş & Ortaçtepe (2016); Boers et al. (2006); Khodadady & Shamsaee (2012); Mohammadi & Enayati (2018); Shen (2015); Stengers et al. (2011); Mahdavi-Zafarghandi et al. (2015)
Medium	2	McGuire & Larson-Hall (2017); Thomson (2017)
No Significant	1	Afzali (2015)

Note. N= 10

[a] Only studies that showed a correlation between fluency and formulaic language were considered.

[b] Only the two research focuses, teaching formulaic language and knowledge of formulaic language were considered.

Table 5 compares the studies that showed a correlation analysis between fluency and formulaic language. In the previous section, the effects of formulaic language and speaking performance were accounted, in which fluency turned out to be the major effect. However, since the second research question addresses the relation between learners' speaking fluency and formulaic language, this table aims to account at what extend formulaic language affects fluency. Therefore, the 10 studies which presented a correlation analysis between the two variables were analyzed.

Data from this table shows that seven studies determined a significant relationship between formulaic language and fluency. Subsequently, two studies showed a medium relationship, and only one a no-significant relationship between the variables.

A significant relationship could be observed in Üstünbaş and Ortaçtepe's (2016) study. They showed that by correlating students' formulaic language use and their fluency scores, a significant relationship could be observed implying that students who made use of more

formulaic language tended to be more fluent speakers. However, Thomson (2017) and Afzali (2015) did not support this relationship. The former reported that although a positive correlation was found, it fell short of significance. Therefore, even though the data from his study suggested the presence of a relationship, it did not confirm it. Subsequently, the later concluded that instruction on formulaic language had no significant effect on learners' fluency because the correlation showed no significant relationship.

It is apparent from these results, although limited by the number of studies, that there is a noteworthy relationship between formulaic language and learners' speaking fluency. That is to say, as learners' formulaic language use significantly increases so does their fluency in speech. It can be concluded that formulaic language plays an important role in learners' speaking fluency, and that this relation should not be ignored. Indeed, further research can provide insight and raise awareness of formulaic language as an important feature assisting learners' speaking performance.

Throughout the chapter, five different categories arose from the analysis of 18 studies. From this examination, it was accounted that formulaic language has received considerable attention in the last years and that interest is increasing among researchers regarding the effects that formulaic language might bring to L2 learners. Fluency turned out to be the major effect learners might get form the availability of formulaic language which might help them come across as proficient speakers. Besides fluency being the major reported effect, a significant relationship was also accounted between formulaic language and fluency. Nevertheless, the analysis also showed areas in need for further investigation. Taken together, all the categories of the analysis helped to answer the research questions and met the research objectives.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the findings accounted in the previous chapter. As mentioned above, overall studies were grouped and coded in five categories which were aimed to answer the two research questions: a) What are the implications of the knowledge of formulaic language to EFL learners' speaking performance, and b) What is the relation between the knowledge of formulaic language and EFL learners' speaking fluency.

Research on formulaic language has been increasing in the last years especially regarding the effects of teaching it. Learners' speaking performance seems to benefit when formulaic language is available in their lexicon. A possible reason why researchers have been concerned with formulaic language and speaking performance might be because formulaic language has been associated with the act of speaking since it might facilitate language production and comprehension reducing the cognitive load that speaking requires (Schmitt, 2010). Indeed, as Wray (2000) and Wray and Perkins (2000) suggest, formulaic sequences may aid the speaker to save effort in processing and to achieve interactional functions.

As the analysis has shown, formulaic language seems to influence ELF learners' speaking performance in different areas such as fluency, oral proficiency, and communicative competence. However, these results need to be interpreted with caution due to the complexity of the terms. That is to say, fluency, in its broad sense, might be used as a cover term for oral proficiency; while in its narrow sense, as a separate component of oral proficiency (Lennon, 1990). Moreover, proficiency is a term constantly under debate regarding its components and

measuring criteria, and comparably, communicative competence has been usually related to proficiency (Benatti, 2013). All of these concerns pose difficulties while interpreting the results.

Researchers such as Boers, et al. (2006) not only suggested that formulaic language improved learners' fluency, but also they linked that former outcome with learners' oral proficiency; further suggesting that formulaic language might help learners come across as proficient speakers. It seems possible that these results are due to the notion that fluency might be used both broadly as a cover term for oral proficiency, in which being fluent is considered as having the highest degree of command of a foreign language, and narrowly as a separate component of oral proficiency commonly used in methods for oral examinations (Lennon, 1990). Consequently, it might be the case that as fluency appears to be improved, so does learners' oral proficiency as well.

Moreover, similar reasoning might be made for the case of communicative competence. In Assassi and Benyelles's (2016) study, formulaic language knowledge was associated with communicative competence. The researchers found in their study that formulaic language helped learners add fluency to their speech to construct a solid communicative competence since, as they believed, communicative competence stands as a correlation between fluency and accuracy. Given the details, it might be that in Assassi and Benyelles's (2016) study, learners' improved fluency helped them perform better in speaking activities, resulting in oral proficiency and finally communicative competence. This association seems plausible since communicative competence, in its rigorous definition, differs little from language proficiency (Ingram & Wylie, 1992). However, since communicative competence, being influenced by formulaic language has not been found elsewhere, it cannot be taken as a significant finding.

Consequently, it can be said that the analysis has shown that the knowledge of formulaic language implies that EFL learners might add fluency to their speech which in some cases it can help them come across as proficient speakers of the language. Furthermore, since fluency was the major effect accounted in the analysis, it needs to be discussed as well.

In the literature, formulaic language has been often associated with fluency due to its characteristic of not requiring extensive retrieving effort and planning (Brand & Götz, 2011). Indeed, some authors as Pawley and Syder (1983) further suggest that a characteristic of the fluent discourse entails the use of prefabricated expressions since they need little processing effort. These assumptions might explain the reason why fluency and formulaic language have received considerable attention in language teaching contexts, especially in EFL contexts.

In the analysis, it was possible to illustrate that there was a significant relationship between the knowledge of formulaic language and learner's speaking fluency. However, even though the majority of studies showed a significant relationship between the two variables, some studies did not confirm it. In Afzali's (2015) study, the correlation between knowledge of formulaic language and learners' fluency had no significant effect. This discrepancy could be attributed to the statement that the acquisition of formulaic language is quite problematic for L2 learners due to several factors such as the lack of teaching material (Ma, 2009) and limited exposure to the target language (Lenko-Szymaska, 2014). As the analysis illustrated regarding the teaching of formulaic language, there is still call for further research concerning teaching materials, methods, and syllabus design (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016; Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012).

In brief, research has shown that the knowledge of formulaic language implies that EFL learners might add fluency to their speaking performance, which in some cases might help them

come across as proficient speakers. Furthermore, there seems to be a noteworthy relationship between formulaic language and EFL learners' fluency as the majority of studies showed a significant correlation between the variables.

6.2 Recommendations

This research synthesis concludes by addressing certain observations for further research. As the investigation showed, in future work, studies might not only concentrate on numerical results, but implement a mixed-method to collect data. Possibly, as some researchers suggested, a qualitative approach may help examine the association between formulaic language and speaking performance in depth (Boers et al., 2006 & Stengers et al., 2011). Research on formulaic language and language teaching might also concentrate on the design of teaching material and syllabus, and accurate teaching methods (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016; Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012).

Indeed, further research should address the effectiveness of teaching methodologies that have been adopted in past and current studies. Additionally, future work might study the relationship between formulaic language and EFL learners' speaking performance in early stages of learning. As formulaic language has been associated with saving effort in processing and planning, research might also address whether formulaic language might influence other learning skills such as listening and writing.

Lastly, the present findings should encourage language teachers to incorporate formulaic language in their teaching lessons since the investigation has shown positive results when developing and improving EFL learners' speaking performance. Furthermore, these findings should raise awareness of the suitability of teaching and learning formulaic language and promote further research regarding the phenomena to ascertain a clearer standpoint.

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Appendix 1

List of Primary Studies for Analysis

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