



THE USE OF FORMULAIC LANGUAGE BY ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LEARNERS IN WRITING PROFICIENCY EXAMS

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Abstract:

This article examines how formulaic language affects EFL learners' writing skills, especially when it comes to test situations. Students can improve their fluency, coherence, and cohesiveness by using formulaic language, which includes fixed terms, idioms, and collocations. Although these previously taught structures make writing easier and increase self-assurance, they can also result in formulaic, uninspired responses that lack depth and originality if they are used excessively or inappropriately. The article explores the benefits and drawbacks of formulaic expressions, emphasising the value of contextual awareness and well-rounded teaching strategies. To maximise learners' use of formulaic language, pedagogical tactics like contextualised instruction and creative adaption tasks are suggested. The article concludes by highlighting the necessity of complex evaluation standards that promote creativity and reward efficient utilisation.

Keywords: Formulaic language, EFL writing, Writing proficiency exams, Collocations, Idiomatic expressions, Language acquisition strategies, Second language writing, Academic writing, Contextual language use, Language assessment

A fascinating topic of research is how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners utilise formulaic language when completing proficiency tests because it relates to learner strategies, assessment procedures, and language acquisition. Collocations, idioms, sentence structures, and set expressions are examples of formulaic language. These are frequently pre-learned and employed in efficient communication. This language serves as both a possible constraint and a facilitative aid in the context of EFL writing. Writing has been said to be the most challenging of the language abilities since it demonstrates how people use a language to express ideas, dispute arguments, and synthesise credible viewpoints (Abdaloussein, H.F, 2022).



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Thus, it is believed that one of the prerequisites for good communication is proficient writing (Smith, 2013).

Formulaic Words as a Tool for Facilitation

EFL learners have a solid basis for writing in a second language thanks to formulaic expressions. Wood (2002) explained that formulaic language is "multi-word or multi-word strings produced and recalled as a chunk, like a single lexical item, rather than being generated from individual items and rules" (p. 3). It is also used to describe multiword units of language that are retrieved as single units from long-term memory (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998). By using these idioms as linguistic shortcuts, students can communicate concepts clearly and concisely without having to start from scratch when creating sentences. For instance, academic and formal writing frequently uses expressions like "On the one hand... on the other hand," "It is widely acknowledged that...", or "In conclusion." Instead of battling with grammar or syntax, students can concentrate more on organisation and content by employing such structures. According to research, using formulaic language improves writing's consistency and cohesiveness. Formulaic terms serve as a reader's guide, and examiners frequently prefer essays with a coherent flow of ideas. Additionally, the use of idiomatic phrases and collocations can elevate the perceived fluency and sophistication of an EFL learner's writing.

Difficulties and Restrictions

Formulaic language can help with confidence and fluency, but using it too much might limit creativity and result in writing that is repetitive and formulaic. Essays that appear impractical or too prepared may be penalised by examiners. For example, when several test takers use the same words they have committed to memory, their essays may seem similar, which lessens the impact of their arguments. Formulaic expressions are misused, which is another problem. Students' intended message may be undermined by their choice of odd or inappropriate language if they lack a sophisticated knowledge of context and register. When utilised in an informal narrative essay, for instance, a formal idiom could come across as strange or out of



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place. In addition to contextual awareness and adaptability, formulaic language instruction is crucial, as these mistakes demonstrate.

Educational Consequences

From a pedagogical standpoint, it takes equilibrium to incorporate formulaic language into writing training. This is especially true, in my opinion, for learners at intermediate levels, when knowing these words can assist them fill in linguistic gaps. The ability of students to generate unique ideas or modify their writing style for various situations, however, may be hampered by an over-reliance on formulaic language. Formulaic language is therefore a useful tool, but it should be used in conjunction with writing exercises that encourage adaptability and originality. According to Lee (2002), a text's coherence is defined as the relationships between its concepts that enable readers to infer meaning. Regarding the connection between coherence and formulaic language use, Hyland (2008) highlights that the lack or improper use of formulaic expressions may be a sign of insufficient writing fluency. Teachers ought to stress how important it is to use these terms as aids rather than crutches. Over-reliance can be lessened with exercises that inspire students to creatively modify formulaic language. For instance, students can be required to integrate formulaic lines into distinct contexts or rewrite them in various registers. Teaching collocations and idioms in relevant circumstances is also crucial for making sure students grasp their cultural and pragmatic subtleties. Errors are decreased, and more organic usage is encouraged. Examples of how native speakers employ formulaic language in a variety of contexts can be given to learners through corpus-based learning and exposure to real texts.

Evaluation and Commentary

Without overemphasising formulaic language as the only measure of writing ability, proficiency tests should take this into consideration. The proper and improper usage of formulaic language could be differentiated by rubrics. In order to achieve a balance that demonstrates both skill and originality, examiners' feedback should also encourage students to blend memorised phrases with unique information.



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Conclusion

EFL learners' use of formulaic language when writing proficiency tests emphasises how strategy and skill interact when learning a second language. Overuse or misuse of these terms can diminish originality and precision, even while they can improve fluency and coherence.

Teachers can assist students in maximising the advantages of formulaic language to succeed in writing assessments and beyond by promoting a more profound comprehension of context and the prudent application of language.

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