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BOOK REVIEW

WHO NEEDS LANGUAGE?

CORRIGAN, ROBERTA & MORAVCSIK, EDITH A. & OUALI, HAMID & WHEATLEY, KATHLEEN M. (eds.): *Formulaic Language I (Distribution and Historical Change) & II (Acquisition, Loss, Psychological Reality, and Functional Explanations)*. *Typological Studies in Language* 82–83. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009. 638 pages + 24 page introduction + 9 page author index + 19 page subject index.

Frog

Formulaic Language is a rich trove of strong papers on formulaic language and diverse aspects of its relationships to composition, discourse and meaning. Treatments range from the spoken word and oral poetics to constructions and collocations in academic discourse. Case studies may span a thousand years of language development or be synchronically focused, exploiting an electronic corpus of millions of words for statistical analysis.

The fields of folklore and ethnography are predominantly concerned with products of language, whether oriented toward typologies, applications and interrelationships, or the generation and communication of meanings. John Miles Foley (2002: 127–128) has proposed the adage, “Oral traditions work like language, only more so.” However, this adage does us little good without a sensitivity to how language actually works, or how the use of language in memorates should be considered in relation to language in oral epic or in the bustling noise and unmistakable odour of a fish market: in order to truly appreciate what something *is*, it is essential to also recognize what it is *not*.

The study of any tradition of folklore or cultural expression is inherently interdisciplinary. It is therefore crucial to maintain an awareness of developments in related disciplines. However, there is a tendency to see no further than the horizons of the

discourse of our own fields. Rather than maintaining awareness of what is happening in related disciplines, we are inclined to be satisfied with those exemplars which have already become domesticated in our own, whether generated from within, or adopted from without. For a folklorist, 'formulaic language' first draws to mind Oral Formulaic Theory. Lord's famous monograph *The Singer of Tales* (1960) appeared half a century ago. It proved an accessible and relevant approach to 'formulaic language' for folklorists owing to its formulation through studies on oral poetics. 'Ethnopoetics' and the 'Ethnography of Speaking' (e.g. Hymes 1981; Tedlock 1983) have gradually become terms ready on the tongues of our trades, yet Lord's study continues to dominate our field of vision concerning 'formulae'. A disagreeable consequence of this is that the bias toward oral poetics leaves formulaicity divorced from other uses of language within our discourse – even today some scholars think of 'formulaic language' as connected specifically with poetry. This emphasizes the degree to which we may lack perspective on our own objects of study. Sure, the adage "Oral traditions work like language, only more so" sounds cool, but it does us no good if we cannot see beyond a single corpus or phenomenon.

Studies which are inherently interdisciplinary need to keep track of developments in related disciplines. For example, it is essential for researchers of folklore and ethnography to maintain an awareness of the possibilities of language use, to develop sensitivities to how it *can* be used in order to see beyond the constructs of the disciplines. In this era of changing technologies, we also have to remain aware of the problems, applications and possibilities of, for example, electronic corpora and the range of insights which they make possible. Maintaining awareness requires a degree of work and effort – not unlike the time and attention many of us invest in reading newspapers and keeping up our contacts in Facebook. The essay collection *Formulaic Language* is a particularly useful volume for tapping into the discourse on studies of language through the range of views and approaches which it brings forward and the broad range of issues addressed.

THE COLLECTION IN OVERVIEW

With its first pages, *Formulaic Language* already proves itself an excellent resource. The introduction (included in both volumes) is accessible and easy to read, with basic introductions to formulae, formulaic language, and research questions, all used to frame the individual contributions to the volume. The introduction will itself be of value to any reader with little or no familiarity with formulae, their relationships to meaning and discourse, and how they are comparable to other "chunks of routinized behaviour" (p. xxiv).

The body of the collection consists of twenty-eight essays divided into six sections across two (consecutively paged) volumes. Each paper opens with a table of contents (sections and subsections with page numbers) followed by an abstract. I loved this presentation strategy. Not only was it useful when first approaching a paper, but

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doubly so when returning to check, compare or cite the text. I found that I generally preferred scanning the table of contents to reading the abstract, and I hope that this strategy will be employed more widely. Author and subject indices were published in full in both volumes, a strategy which I also found unexpectedly convenient. *Formulaic Language* is exceptionally user-friendly.

What is Formulaic Language? I heartily recommend the first section to any reader. Andrew Pawley offers a discussion of “Grammarians’ Languages versus Humanists’ Languages”, addressing varying conceptions of the ‘formula’ in different fields. Particular attention is given to speech act formulae, inclusive of melody and body language. Pawley presents a valuable introduction to principles of ‘native-like fluency’. Alison Wray is true to form in her contribution, “Identifying Formulaic Language”. She offers a condensed presentation of her approach to formulaic language (which emerges as a cornerstone of many contributions of the volume), and presents fascinating case studies addressing relationships between maintaining the flow of expression and accuracy in representation. Wray’s contribution is advisable for anyone interested in oral performance.

Structure and Distribution: Andreea S. Calude offers a valuable study of demonstrative clefts in spoken English, addressing their functions in spoken discourse, including managing the pace or flow of expression. Jean Hudson and Maria Wiktorsson offer a case study on the relater *about* (e.g. ‘A joke *about*...’) on the basis of a corpus of approximately 4.2 million words of conversation. Hudson and Wiktorsson focus on semantic prosody (i.e. the degree to which words develop positive or negative associations through patterns of usage) and the degree to which the “pervasive negative prosody” of *about* (p. 94) can impact word-choice (e.g. ‘a paper *about*’ vs. ‘a paper *on*’, both grammatically correct). Elma Kerz and Florian Haas turn to formulaic constructions in academic writing and their indexical associations. Tsuyoshi Ono and Sandra A. Thompson examine “Fixedness in Japanese Adjectives in Conversation” contrasted with their relative compositional freedom of English. They highlight problems in attaining native-like fluency and relative degrees of fixedness in lexical combinations (varying according to genre). Jessie Sams presents a thought-provoking statistical study across written English genres of quotative construction usage (i.e. verbal indications of direct speech). Although a bit challenging to read, Joanna Szerszunowicz offers an intriguing discussion of the evaluative markedness and implications of toponyms in idioms.

Historical Change: Joan Bybee and Rena Torres Cacoullos present an excellent study of “The Role of Prefabs in Grammaticization”. Bybee and Torres Cacoullos address verb constructions and collocations, tracing English and Spanish examples through the centuries. They consider the relationship between the development of specific and general constructions over time, their semantics and the semantics of their constituents, and their capacity to emerge as centers in the grammaticizing of

constructions. This pairs very nicely with Damián Vergara Wilson's contribution at the conclusion of the section. Wilson examines 'quedar(se) + adjective' constructions in frequency and application by century, beginning with the 1200's. The two papers frame the section as a whole. In "Formulaic Models and Formulaicity in Classical and Modern Standard Arabic", Giuliano Lancioni argues that early poetic formulae passed into common constructions in later language. Hans Lindquist examines formulaic sequences of up to eight elements containing 'preposition + *hand*' in a 100 million word corpus, showing "that language is a mixture of repetition and creation, of drawing on stored sequences and constructing fresh strings by means of rules" (p. 254). This is one of several contributions addressing processes of lexicalization which are valuable for the consideration of emic conceptions of 'words' in oral cultures and traditions. James J. Mischler III argues that conceptualization through metaphor exists on a continuum from embodied experience to socially communicated cultural models. This is accomplished through a case study of 'spleen' metaphors in the history of the English language.

Acquisition and Loss: Colin Bannard and Elena Lieven open the second volume with an insightful and informative case study on "Repetition and Reuse in Child Language Learning". Chigusa Kurumada directs attention to frequency studies in first language acquisition, discussing the changing frequency and functions of a formula in mother-child interaction. Ann M. Peters examines processes of segmentation and unpacking grammar in initial language acquisition – recognizing word boundaries and relating verbal chunks to the language system. In "Formulaic Language from a Learner Perspective: What the Learner Needs to Know", Britt Erman emphasizes collocations in the development of native-like fluency in second language acquisition. Aaron Ohlrogge discusses differences in formulaic sequences and formulaic usage within the process of second language acquisition, while Natsue Sugaya and Yasuhiro Shirai approach second language internalization of Japanese tense-aspect markers and the development from rote learning to rule acquisition. These are complemented by Susanne Rott's discussion of "The Effect of Awareness-Raising on the Use of Formulaic Constructions". Diana Van Lancker Sidtis anticipates the following section by turning attention to neurolinguistic studies in a fascinating paper which outlines "Formulaic and Novel Language in a 'Dual Process' Model of Language Competence".

Psychological Reality: Nick C. Ellis and Eric Frey present experiment-based evidence for "The Psycholinguistic Reality of Collocation and Semantic Prosody" showing that contrast with semantic prosody interferes with the recognition and interpretation of juxtaposed words. Vsevolod Kapatsinski and Joshua Radicke offer a valuable study of the detection of the particle *up* or its acoustic equivalent within a word, concluding that "*the stronger the whole, the weaker the parts*" (p. 518, original emphasis). Kapatsinski and Radicke's research is potentially significant for research on aspects of poetics, such as rhyme and alliteration.

Functional Explanations: Heidrun Dorgeloh and Anja Wanner approach abstracts as a genre of scientific discourse, with comparison across fields of study and development through history. They present a stimulating discussion of “the *paper* construction”, in which a textual product is attributed with agency (e.g. “This paper argues...”). M. Catherine Gruber discusses the pros and cons of formulaic language in expressions which should reflect sincerity. John Haiman and Noerung Ourn offer a fruitful discussion of “Decorative Symmetry in Ritual (and Everyday) Language”. I found this paper particularly valuable for its discussion of uses of reduplication in different languages and application contexts which are easily taken for granted, although they would be identified with parallelism, repetition, alliteration and rhyme if they were embedded in a metrical framework. Shoichi Iwasaki addresses strategies for the maintenance of the flow of discourse in English and Thai. The collection closes with a striking treatment of “Routinized Uses of the First Person Expression *for me* in Conversational Discourse” by Joanne Scheibman. I must admit that I was not particularly drawn by this title, yet I quite unexpectedly found myself enthralled by the complexity and implications of what seems such a small and rudimentary element of everyday speech.

LITERATURE

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