Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences in an English-Speaking Country: A Longitudinal Case Study

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Kim, Jeongeun Jessie(2015), “Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences in an English-Speaking Country: A Longitudinal Case Study,” Language & Information Society 25. Formulaic sequence (FS) has drawn the attention of researchers in both theoretical and applied linguistics, probably due to its prevalence in natural language and its facilitative function in language acquisition and processing. Studies on FS in second language (L2) acquisition have mostly analyzed written data collected from instructed L2 learners at different proficiency levels while there has been little research on gradual development of formulaic language in the L2 of naturalistic learners. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by analyzing longitudinal data collected from a participant who spent a year in Australia while participating in the Working Holiday Visa Program. The data were collected from the participant’s postings on Facebook over the span of a year, producing a corpus of 8,988 words, which was then divided into two parts: postings before and during residence in Australia. The latter was further divided into six periods, consisting of two months each. For the coding of the FSs, lists presented in Martinez and Schmitt (2012) and Shin and Nation (2008) were utilized. The data analysis

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revealed the followings: Seventy seven new items were found in the participant’s postings over the one-year period of staying abroad, with a significant difference in the type-token ratio of the FSs between the periods before and during residence in Australia. Moreover, the participant’s uses of formulaic expressions were appropriate in most cases, without violating syntactic or pragmatic rules. Colloquial and idiomatic formulas which were not presented in the lists were also produced by the participant, which may be attributed to the specific language learning environment the participant was in. Despite the apparent improvement in the use of FSs, some limitations in the use of FS were also observed; that is, most of the FSs were compositional and consisted of high frequency vocabulary, which should have contributed to the easy acquisition and accurate use. It appears that immersion environment without explicit instruction can help L2 learners acquire FSs, though with some limitations. For a better understanding of the effect of naturalistic L2 learning on the acquisition of FS, however, further research is needed which compares at-home and study abroad groups.

keywords: formulaic sequence, formulaic language, lexical phrase, collocation, chunk expression

1. Introduction

1.1. Backgrounds and Objectives

The importance of teaching and studying formulaic sequence (FS) (i.e. recurrent combinations of words) was overlooked in the last few decades. However, an increasing amount of attention has been put on FS in recent studies, confirming that formulaicity takes on a prominent role in linguistic pedagogy. Even with a language learner equipped with grammatical com-