

Book Reviews • Comptes rendus

Fanny Forsberg. 2008. *Le langage préfabriqué: Formes, fonctions et fréquences en français parlé L2 et L1*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG. 293 pp.

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With the re-emergence of formulaic language as a hot topic in linguistics, Forsberg produces a timely work that examines the forms, functions, and frequencies of formulaic sequences (henceforth FSs) in spoken French as a first- (L1) and second- (L2) language. She also documents innovative interlanguage FSs that are characteristic of the early phases of L2 acquisition.

In Chapter 1, Forsberg discusses the difficulty of defining FSs, before adopting an inclusive definition based on Wray (2002) and introducing her research questions. Chapter 2 provides a thorough description of FSs in both general and acquisitional linguistics. Chapter 3 presents psycholinguistic models that could explain the (non)-acquisition of FSs, while Chapter 4 examines empirical research on FSs in L2 acquisition. Chapters 5 and 6 touch on important learner-related characteristics for the analysis: individual differences, sociocultural integration, and the native speaker (NS) norm. In Chapter 7, Forsberg presents a variety of definitions of FSs and models in which they can be analysed, before arriving at her own contextually-based definition that allows for the inclusion of divergent L2 learner forms. Her modified and expanded analytical framework, based on Erman and Warren (2000), is comprised of six categories: 1) lexical (coup de foudre “love at first sight”), 2) grammatical (un petit peu “a little bit”), 3) discursive (textual: c’est “it is”; own-speech management: je pense “I think”), 4) interactive (d’accord “okay”), 5) interlanguage (ils n’ont pas la morale “they aren’t in good spirits”), and 6) situational (j’ai X ans “I’m X years old”).

In her first analysis (Chapter 8), Forsberg inventories FSs in the InterFra corpus of Swedish learners of French representing a continuum of beginning- to near-native stages of acquisition (sixteen university-level beginners, twelve high-school students, and six advanced university students). Data from the semi-structured interviews is compared to that of six native-speakers (Socrates exchange students). Based on her examination of the quantity, categories, and type/token distribution of FSs, Forsberg is the first to posit an acquisitional continuum for French in which the quantity of FSs increases as a function of proficiency and the largest percentage of FSs are present in NS discourse. Distribution across categories also becomes increasingly native-like, albeit slowly, as a function of proficiency. Early acquisition contains FSs from all of the documented categories, but is characterized by the use of unanalyzed Situational and Interlanguage FSs. Discursive FSs, the most widely used forms at all proficiency levels, are shown to be good candidates for early acquisition because of their natural frequency and fixedness. However, advanced learners overuse these forms, compared to the NSs-Socrates. Lexical FS usage shows greater variability across the continuum and poses acquisitional difficulties. Overall, advanced university-level learners use considerably less FSs than NSs and across-category distribution differs significantly, most notably in the case of Lexical FSs (a frequent category in L1 that is underdeveloped in L2 speech).

Chapter 9 completes the proposed developmental continuum with a secondary analysis of FS usage by six very advanced L2 French learners having resided in Paris for at least five years (Corpus Forsberg) and six Parisian NSs. Overall, Forsberg reports a native-like quantity of FSs in the discourse of very advanced learners, which differs significantly from that of the advanced learners in Sweden ($p < 0.005$). Forsberg asserts that it is not the rate of FS usage that distinguishes advanced and very advanced L2 speakers from NSs, but rather their across-category distribution. For example, advanced learners exhibit decreased usage of Lexical FSs and significantly overuse Discursive FSs when compared to the two groups from Paris ($p < 0.01$); very advanced learners differ significantly from NSs only in their over-use of Discursive FSs ($p < 0.05$).

The case studies of “extreme” learners across the proficiency spectrum presented in Chapters 8 & 9 make for fascinating reading and provide illustrative examples not only of the functions of FSs, but also of their importance in fluent production. Based on these qualitative analyses of speech, Forsberg concludes that in early acquisition a holistic learning style (in contrast to an analytic one) favors FS usage. At more advanced levels, input, linguistic disposition and motivation are most important.

In the end, Forsberg poses more questions that she originally set out to answer, as is evidenced by the abundance of suggestions for future research. While this may be frustrating for some readers, it underlines how little we know about FS acquisition in (L2) French and the potential implications for pedagogy. Forsberg is well aware of the weaknesses of her methodology (e.g., difficulties in identifying FSs in production; speaker diversity: monolinguals vs. bilinguals; geographical diversity: France vs. Sweden) and the limited generalizability of the findings (p. 131). Despite the exploratory nature of her dissertation research, however, she provides valuable insights into the acquisition and use of FSs, in a book that will be read with interest by researchers, language instructors and aspiring “near-native” speakers alike.

References

- Erman, B., & Warren, B. (2000). The idiom principle and the open choice principle. *Text 20*, 39-62.
- Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.