

Research on the Application of Formulaic Language in College Students' Spoken English Communication

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Abstract: Formulaic language refers to a fixed or semi-fixed multi-word combination between words and sentences. Formulaic language covers a wide range, including idioms, speech programs, grammatical structures, various collocations and so on. If college students can use formulaic language reasonably in spoken communication, it means that they can successfully retrieve relevant prefabricated chunks and phrases from their brains. At the same time, the use of formulaic language makes the sentence structure which is outputted by college students more logical, and the expression more fluent and authentic, which to some extent promotes the college students' spoken communication ability. This paper aims to explore the application of formulaic language in college students' spoken English communication, and how learners' psychology and other factors affect the output of college students' formulaic language, thus affecting the communication atmosphere and effect.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the era of economic globalization, communications between countries are becoming increasingly frequent. English, as one of the international languages, has already become an important carrier of international communications in politics, economy, culture, technology and other fields. College students, as the youth power to promote the development of the era, are particularly important to improve the ability of spoken English communication. However, under China's exam-oriented education model, college students often indulge in the excessive assignments tactic and then neglect spoken English training. Therefore, in the process of communication, college students often fall into an awkward dilemma because of word poverty or incoherence. Due to the relatively failed communication experience, some college students will gradually lose their confidence in spoken English communication. With the rise of corpus linguistics, the value of formulaic language has become increasingly prominent. As a prefabricated chunk in people's minds, it helps to improve college students' spoken English communication ability.

2. The Connotation of Formulaic Language

Li Gengchun wrote in *On the View of Integration: Saving and Taking in Formulaic language:*

“The processing of formulaic language (i.e. understanding and output) is faster than control phrases, that is, the degree of automation of formulaic language processing is higher than that of control phrases.^[1] However, from this advantage itself, we cannot directly draw the conclusion that the formulaic language is stored as a whole.” However, Liang Nina pointed out in *The Role and Inspiration of Formulaic language in Foreign Language Learning* that although there are disputes about the expression, definition and classification of formulaic language, the research of formulaic language at home and abroad is of practical significance for foreign language learning in recent years, and foreign language learners should make full use of formulaic language to improve their language ability and communicative ability. ^[2]To conclude, formulaic language plays an irreplaceable role in promoting college students' spoken English communication. When college students communicate with others in a specific environment, formulaic language can achieve the goal of blurting out, thereby becoming the key to fluent language output, ensuring the quality of the communication process and good experiences of both parties.

3. The Influence factors of Formulaic Language on English Spoken Communication

Language is the product of environment. As a special form of language, formulaic language is bound to be constrained and influenced by a series of factors. For non-analytical chunks in formulaic language, learners can complete their input through overall memorization. The prerequisite for flexible usage of non-analytical chunks is to have a large amount of high-quality input. However, some chunks are difficult to be absorbed by learners due to their low frequency of occurrence and obscurity, which prevents them from outputting formulaic language. Analytical chunks in formulaic language refer to parts of a chunk that are fixed and unchangeable, but other parts can be edited and processed by learners according to the needs of spoken communication. ^[2]It seems that learners have a great deal of autonomy, However, in the context of non-native English speakers, it is inevitable that learners will output some unidiomatic expressions in the actual use, which reduces the efficiency of the application of formulaic language and is not conducive to the progress of English spoken communication.

3.1 The Influence of Language Itself on Spoken English Communication

First of all, from the perspective of accumulation, formulaic language of English includes a large number of fixed allegorical sayings and idioms, which have been developed by generations of English-speaking countries, having specific English thinking and cultural backgrounds. However, for college students whose native language is Chinese, they lack the knowledge of the cultural background of formulaic language, which leads to difficulties in understanding or memorizing them. In addition, according to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, only by ensuring a large amount of language input can achieve a better output. Nevertheless, because of the prefabricated chunks of formulaic language, it takes learners a lot of time and energy to accumulate the expressions of certain formulaic languages and the conditions to use them. Even in the classroom, the teaching mode is dominated by the “analytical” attribute of language, so college students' sentence analysis ability has been greatly enhanced, but generally teachers lack attention to formulaic language. As a result, college students' reserve of formulaic language cannot reach the level of fluent output, so it is difficult to play its due role in spoken communication.

Secondly, from the perspective of the usage of formulaic language, behaviorists believe that the process of language learning is equal to the habit formation process in which people constantly respond to external stimuli. The more frequently language forms appear, the more likely learners are to notice, this frequency accelerates the input process of formulaic language. That is to say, even though college students have mastered the expressions of the formulaic language through a large

amount of input, due to the lack of appropriate scenes for continuous stimulation and repetition, it is likely for them to forget the actual rules of the formulaic language, which is also not conducive to playing their due promotion function. In addition, the formulaic language also includes a certain number of fixed collocations, which are the premises and bases for the rapid output of both parties. Unfortunately, although college students have received strict English collocation training in the process of study, their rich reserves are mostly used in paper-and-pencil tests under the performance-oriented environment. Because of the lack of attention to the role of collocations in spoken communication, consequently, most of the collocations are scattered and there is no topic classification in the minds of college students, which lack the vocal use of formulaic language in actual spoken communication. At last, it is known to all that spoken communication is more flexible and diverse than writing, it has higher requirements on the output speed of fixed collocation. However, in real life, it is difficult for college students to form muscle memory due to the lack of formulaic language training in spoken English communication. Therefore, college students can hardly meet the requirements of immediate expression.

3.2 The influence of Learner Factors on Spoken English Communication

First of all, Lado proposed in 1957 that learners will transfer the meaning and distribution, together with their mother tongue culture to the second language system. When the structural characteristics of the target language are different from those of the learners' mother tongue, the negative transfer of language will occur. As far as English formulaic language is concerned, college students are easily affected by Chinese, which causes mistakes in the usage of English formulaic language. For example, for the formulaic language "break one's leg", Chinese college students generally associate it with the superficial meaning, that is, someone's leg was hurt by others because of some reasons such as something immoral he has done, so eventually evil comes back. But actually it is originated from the drama in Shakespeare. After the performance, the actor bowed his knees to win the tip, which belongs to a blessing.

Secondly, Krashen's affective filtering hypothesis points out that the three main factors affecting learners' language input are motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. If learners' motivation and self-confidence is stronger, anxiety is lower, their language input ability is improved; On the contrary, if learners' motivation is weaker, they have no self-confidence and even low self-esteem, and the degree of anxiety is too high, learners will have a certain degree of preparedness for language input, which is not conducive to good learning results. As a kind of language, the input effect of formulaic language is closely related to the psychological state of learners. Only when college students have a correct and positive understanding of formulaic language and maintain an appropriate level of anxiety for language learning can the quantity and quality of formulaic language input be guaranteed. Additionally, in spoken communication, If communicators use grammar rather than formulaic language to organize their own sentences, as second language learners, they are bound to worry about the correctness of grammar and become overly monitored, which could lead to poor or even stuttering language output, leaving the other party a sense of diffidence. According to different situations, one should confidently apply his accumulated formulaic language to output, only by doing this can the communication work smoothly.

3.3 The Influence of External Environmental Factors on Spoken English Communication

Broadly speaking, language environment can be divided into social environment and classroom language environment. Language acquisition in the natural state is the main source of understanding and generation, which is mainly acquired through natural communication. However, college students, as the second language acquisition learners, lack the natural language environment, they

mainly depend on classroom teaching and communication after class. In the natural environment, language acquisition is focused more on the development of communicative competence, while the spoken practice in the classroom is only limited to virtual dialogues in the book, which are far away from the reality. To some extent, it is out of the real environment and doesn't have communicative significance. In other words, the teaching of formulaic language in the classroom focuses on language form rather than language meaning, which cannot meet the communication needs of formulaic language in real life situations.

In the meanwhile, in the social environment dominated by mother tongue, Chinese college students are generally used to communicating in Chinese, while English, as a second language, is not widely valued. Therefore, for most college students, they are not equipped with an adequate language environment. Research has shown that the external language environment plays a key role in second language acquisition. When children are born, they do not have mature grammatical mechanisms and rich vocabulary reserves. However, due to long-term exposure to the environment of their mother tongue and the subtle influence of the external environment, they naturally acquire their native language. In contrast, as second language learners, due to the lack of social environment of the target language, we do not have sufficient language stimulation, so our motivation to speak English decreases. In the long run, our spoken communication ability is bound not to increase.

In the context of exam-oriented education that emphasizes paper and pencil tests, it blindly stresses the importance of spoken English communication skills and the demand for spoken English talents, ignoring the social shaping of the atmosphere for spoken English. Some college students have formed psychological anxiety and lack of self-confidence about future employment in English, and the accumulation of formulaic language requires repeated consolidation, therefore, to a large extent, learners do not adhere to using formulaic language for spoken English communication.

4. The Role of Formulaic Language in Promoting Spoken English Communication

In English learning, the process of using formulaic language is actually a process of transforming information into ideas and ideas into information. From the perspective of language form, Chinese people are accustomed to hiding sentence relationships such as sequential and reverse connections in language expression, while English people are accustomed to using some relatively obvious transitional conjunctions to connect sentence logic. From the perspective of language collocation, it is difficult for learners to overcome the influence of native language thinking habits and culture. Learners who grow up in countries where English is not their native language often have difficulty complying with English expression habits and tend to rely on Chinese thinking for communication, which is known as Chinglish. Although it is easy to be understood by Chinese people who are also native speakers of Chinese in the process of oral English communication, it is actually divorced from the idiosyncrasy of oral communication. As a conventionalized and conventionalized language unit in language use, formulaic expressions have special logical connectors to express sentence relationships, fixed collocations, etc. to ensure the fluency of the language, and idioms with British and American characteristics to ensure the authenticity of the language. Therefore, skilled use of formulaic language can make expression more logical, fluent, and authentic, effectively promoting oral English communication.

4.1 Cultivate the Logic of Expression

The fluency and coherence of a discourse cannot be separated from cohesion. Logical cohesion is an important part of cohesive devices, and logical cohesive words are important ways to achieve logical connection. For example, the connectives "like, such as" can be used for making examples, and the connectives "but, how" can be used for semantic transition. First of all, for the speaker, the

use of logical connectives can quickly organize their thoughts. When speaking, they will be reasonable and progressive, which strengthens listener's attention, and enhances the sense of topic substitution without panic and inversion. At the same time, the speaker has developed his rational thinking ability.

Firstly, as a fixed language expression structure, formulaic language has fixed meanings and usages. Therefore, in spoken communication, the use of formulaic language can make the logical structure of sentence pattern procedural and form a certain expression format. In spoken communication, college students make their views clearer and easier to be understood by using certain idioms that have logical relations. Secondly, formulaic language with logical function is a significant way to connect words with words. In spoken communication, the use of appropriate connecting words can make the expression sound more natural and help them better explain the views the speaker wants to express. The logical words in the formulaic language are the links of the whole discourse structure, and are the main factors that determine the quality of the discourse. If the content as a whole is not logical, the parts are disjointed from each other, and the beginning and end are not coherent, then the listener will lose patience. Thirdly, the logical connectives in the formulaic language are the necessary conditions to enhance the expressive power of the language. Language is the product of thinking and the carrier of thinking achievements. Language can promote the abstraction and flexibility of thinking. In fact, the process of using formulaic language is the process of transforming information into ideas and ideas into information. It can be said that mastering formulaic language is actually the best training of thinking mode. Formulaic language is not only a medium of thinking, but also a great and effective tool of thinking.

4.2 Increase the Fluency of Expression

The fluency of spoken communication is inseparable from the mastery of formulaic language. First of all, formulaic language is the habitual language formed by both parties in language communication. In terms of input and output, formulaic language plays an important role in comparison with scattered words and phrases. Suqin Jiang wrote in *Research on Formulaic Language in Language Acquisition* that formulaic language has relatively fixed grammatical structure, stable collocation meaning and specific pragmatic environment, which integrates the advantages of grammar, semantics and context, and can reduce the burden of real-time processing of information by the brain. ^[3]Whether it is for college students with poor spoken ability or learners whose topic vocabulary storage cannot reach daily spoken communication, the massive and effective input of formulaic language can enable them to carry out fast and accurate language output. In other words, the more the number of blocks and the higher frequency of block use, the more fluent you will be. ^[4]It can also improve students' efficiency of language expression, improve the fluency of expression, change the dilemma of dare not to communicate and enhance self-confidence in spoken communication. Secondly, the usage of formulaic language has improved the current situation of college students' general use of grammar to pile up spoken expression to a certain extent. In real spoken communication, college students can effectively avoid paying too much attention to the accuracy of language output while ignoring the problem of fluency, it can bring excellent spoken communication experience to both sides, enhance the ability of spoken English output imperceptibly, and greatly strengthen the richness and fluency of expression.

Additionally, the fluency of language output actually depends on the use of communication strategies. When students can't hear others clearly, they can use request chunks. Chunk is another name for formulaic language. If they encounter a topic that not very familiar with, college students should be able to make reasonable changes according to the complexity of the communication topic, select topics related to their accumulated formulaic language, so as to output their own ideas

fluently, keep themselves and the other party in a state of talking, which avoids the awkward situation. Another method to solve this problem is that you can get the formulaic language about the rhetorical questions from your brain, for example, Pardon? Excuse me? The usage of these formulaic languages can help both parties to transmit the language meaning, thus ensuring the fluency of both parties' expression in the whole communication process.

4.3 Enhance the Authenticity of Expression

Authenticity means that the choices of second language words can give people the feeling of native speakers. Although some of the college students can express their views fluently and logically which have few errors in language expression and conform to grammatical norms, they cannot be quickly understood by native speakers of English, or even misunderstand. That is because in most cases the complete and pragmatic discourse are not authentic and do not conform to the habits of English language expression. ^[5] For instance, when second language learners want to express “You are so good to me”, they often say “You are so good.” But the native language often uses “You are so sweet.” Among them, “You are so sweet.” is one of the commonly used formulaic languages in spoken English. In daily spoken communication, we are involuntarily influenced by thinking or culture, and thus produce Chinglish. Research shows that the influence of Chinglish in spoken communication is a problem that most Chinese people will encounter. Therefore, only through a large amount of input of formulaic language can college students gradually understand and get used to the authentic expression of English.

English formulaic language is a language norm formed by native speakers in the long-term process of language communication. It contains English thinking and expression habits of native English speakers. Due to different cultural backgrounds, in the process of learning formulaic language, it is inevitable that college students will have differences in way of thinking between China and the West. However, in the ideological collision, college students may spontaneously learn English allusions, culture and other knowledge behind the formulaic language. In the reality, through communication with people or foreigners around them, college students are also accumulating some idiomatic English expressions. Gradually, owing to the internalization and accumulation of formulaic language by college students in theory and practice, it is helpful for them to cultivate certain English thinking, and to choose appropriate formulaic language from the perspective of native language, so as to ensure the appropriateness and authenticity of language output in daily communication and realize high quality communication.

5. Conclusion

Despite the influence of formulaic language itself, learners, external environment and other factors, formulaic language still plays an important role in college students' spoken English communication and a crucial part in promoting spoken English communication. The acquisition of formulaic language can help college students cultivate English language sense, improve the logic of expression, increase the fluency of expression and enhance the authenticity of expression. In the context of internationalization, college students, as important narrators of Chinese stories and significant communicators of Chinese voices, play a vital role in the international system. We should undertake the social mission, pay attention to the importance of formulaic language for spoken English learning. Only by accumulating formulaic language, can we become the disseminator and spokesman of Chinese culture. In the end, we are able to tell Chinese stories to foreign countries with fluent and authentic English, disseminate Chinese ideas and show the world a comprehensive and three-dimensional image of China.

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