Plenty of research has been conducted on the nature of formulaic language (FL), defined by Wray (2002: 4) as "…word strings which appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition…," that is, multiword units of language which are prefabricated and/or holistically produced and understood. The role of FL in communication and language acquisition has been studied, but relatively little work has focused on how second language (L2) learners may develop awareness of FL and acquire facility with it in specific educational contexts.

The present study is an investigation of how students in a FL-focused university communication class at a Japanese university grew their awareness and skill of using FL through a variety of pedagogical means including form-focused activity, guided oral presentations, and attending to lectures on various aspects of FL. They were required to produce pre and post course freewriting about FL, and to perform an oral presentation about an aspect of FL. This presentation was guided and students were provided with formulaic sequences (FS) to memorize, to aid their crafting of effective academic oral discourse. The study was grounded in the research literature on task-based teaching and the role of memory in language gain, specifically as regards FL and formal, rehearsed speaking.

Formulaic Language and Repetition, Memory, and Production

It appears that benefits accrue from providing students with time and support in preparation for a speech production task. Pre-task planning and online or within-task planning have positive results for spoken language development. Ellis (2005) discusses a range of planning types, and notes that pre-task planning may be in the form of rehearsal of production or strategic planning – ways in which learners can take time to prepare *how* to express the ideas they want or need to formulate. The benefits of within-task planning, or taking time to reflect and plan *while* performing, for fluent production have been studied by Ellis and Yuan (2005), who found that the complexity and accuracy of learner speech improved when allowed online processing time. In the present study, learners were given the opportunity to discuss and revise their presentation topics and to practice their presentations using FL provided by the researchers.

Recently, some developments in the study of formulaic sequences and the ways they may be beneficial to fluent production focus on memorization as a means of boosting competence. The potential value of memory is targeted in research such as that of Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988), who outline principles for encouraging memory to further automatization. Phonemic aspects of formulaic sequences, including alliteration and assonance (Lindstromberg and Boers, 2008a, 2008b) have been shown to aid in the learning or memorization of FS. In the present study, learners were encouraged to memorize formulaic sequences relevant to their presentation topics, in an effort to automatize them.

Several recent studies have been conducted in which participants memorized FL with positive results for effective communication. In one study (Wray, 2008), a beginner learner of Welsh memorized phrases and sentences necessary in order to provide a cooking demonstration broadcast on television, all within a one-week period. The learner

delivered a competent and fluent demonstration and nine months later recalled a significant amount of the targeted language. In another case (Wray, 2008), advanced learners memorized nativelike formulaic ways of expressing ideas which they deemed valuable in everyday encounters with native speakers. After a week of practice and rehearsal, the learners recorded themselves in real life encounters using the memorized material. Participants produced the memorized utterances in their real life encounters, although not always accurately, and they reported that the memorized language aided them in confidence, satisfaction, and feeling like nativelike interlocutors. This supports the assertion of Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer (2006) that use of formulaic sequences can help L2 learners by providing nativelike idiomaticity, a nativelike temporal pattern of speech, and multiword strings of accurate speech. The learners in the present study underwent a process similar to those in Wray's studies, in that they memorized FL in order to achieve nativelike idiomaticity and multiword strings of accurate speech in a real-life task, in this case an in-class presentation

Memorization has been viewed in Western contexts as a questionable and archaic learning technique with limited potential for language acquisition, but evidence from Asian learners has indicated a role for memorization and repetition of texts in language acquisition. Some research with Chinese learners suggests that memorization may have some utility in facilitating understanding of written texts (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000). Other research has shown a measurable perceived positive effect of memorization. Ding (2007) found positive effects of memorization of large amounts of text by university students in China. After extensive experience memorizing lengthy texts in English, students reported that the practice had made them better communicators in English by enhancing their fluency, focusing attention on collocations and formulas, and enabling the transfer of these to real life communication. Similarly, Walker and Utsumi (2006) found that memorizing dialogues in Japanese as a second language was valued by learners as a learning technique and as a boost to fluency and transferable to real life communication. In another recent study, Dai and Ding (2010) found that Chinese L2 learners of English who engaged in text memorization activities used more FSs in their L2 writing than those who did not, and that their writing proficiency and ability outstripped that of learners who did not memorize texts. These pieces of research provide hints of a potentially powerful effect of memorization in furthering language proficiency and production.

Psycholinguistic research into phonological memory appears relevant to FL processing and retention. The basic model of working memory, as elaborated by Baddeley (2000) and others, is that language production involves the short-term retention of aspects of language in a cognitive loop. The loop has several components: a visual-spatial sketchpad which holds visual and spatial information related to the target language items; a phonological loop which deals with verbal information and is linked to phonological memory; an episodic buffer which integrates information from the sketchpad and phonological loop with long-term memory. Phonological memory is said to facilitate language acquisition through a process of holding phonological information temporarily over and over until a permanent or long-term memory representation can be created. This aspect of the working memory model has been studied quite extensively in laboratory

settings, and considerable evidence exists to confirm the existence of a phonological loop (see Baddeley, Gathercole, & Papagno, 1998). While studies of adult L2 acquisition and phonological memory are numerous and have actually indicated that phonological memory plays a significant role in vocabulary acquisition, a limited body of work has investigated possible links between phonological memory and oral L2 fluency.

O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, and Collentine (2007) examined phonological memory in the context of the real world of language learning, comparing the development of Spanish L2 fluency of native speakers of English in a regular university language program and a study-abroad semester. Psycholinguistic tests of phonological memory were conducted before and after a semester of study and examined for correlation with gains in speech fluency over the same period of time. Results indicated that, independent of the learning context, phonological memory actually appears to be related to gains in L2 fluency. One could speculate that the effect of phonological memory on the ability to retain and produce formulaic sequences may be a key component of the fluency gains of the learners in this study.

In practice, then, it appears that repetition is important if formulaic sequences are to be automatized, or readly available for use in spontaneous discourse. Repetition can be built into tasks in a number of ways, including the repetition of a particular task in its entirety, such as a presentation or a role play, or form-focused, with a focus on improving particular points of language such as FS. In the present study, students were encouraged to repeat FL in order to memorize it for use in a presentation.

In light of the existing knowledge of the possible role of memorization and repetition in developing facility with FL, and the notion that experience using FL in real-life performance might heighten student awareness of the nature and utility of FL, we conducted our research to address these two questions:

1. When students have been provided with FL to repeat and memorize specific to a performance task, will they use it appropriately in the task?
2. Will a range of experience with FL, including using it in performance tasks, heighten student awareness of the nature and utility of FL?

Methods

The course

In an attempt to examine how particular pedagogical practices can facilitate awareness and use of formulaic language, we engaged students in a communication studies course at a Japanese university in a range of activity. The 14-session course of 22 students followed a mixed syllabus of lectures, form-focused tasks, and group and individual oral presentations, all conducted entirely in English:

- The form-focused tasks were adapted from McCarthy and O'Dell (2005)
- Lecture topics included identification, formulaic language and second language acquisition, code-switching, spoken fluency, and lexical bundles.
- Students prepared and performed group presentations on aspects of Japanese FL which were of interest, and received content and language-focused feedback.

Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from students over the course of the semester:

- students were coached and provided with formulaic sequences to practice and memorize for a final oral presentation about formulaic language
- students produced a piece of freewriting on the first and last days of the course, responding to the prompt "what is formulaic language and why is it important?"

Eight students volunteered to participate in a round of activity designed to examine the idea that memorizing formulaic sequences for a specific purpose can be beneficial. The individual final presentations for the course were scaffolded and guided, and the participants were provided with formulaic sequences which could aid in effective and appropriate expression of their chosen content.

Each participant met with a researcher several times to select a presentation topic, refine the topic, and create an outline. After the initial round of meetings, each participant presented a spoken draft of his or her presentation to the researcher, who gave feedback on content, organization, and language.

The researcher provided each participant with a number of specific formulaic sequences which could refine and augment the presentation. The sequences were chosen based on their appropriateness for the expressions of particular functions in the discourse of the presentations, following the metacategories of lexical bundles (a functionally specialized subset of FL) elaborated by Biber, Conrad & Cortes (2004). While the categories are presented by Biber et. al. as a way of classifying lexical bundles as to discourse function, they are readily applicable to FL in general. *Referential* sequences deal with factual content, and characteristics such as quantity, time, and space, for example *a number of*, *a range of*, and *late by X minutes*. 11such sequences were provided in total. *Discourse* sequences deal with organizing information, for example *all in all*, *in the course of*, and *some of which are*. 16 such sequences were provided in total. Stance sequences deal with modality, attitude, and a link to the listener, for example *curious as to why*, a*s illustrated here*, and t*he truth is that*. 18 such sequences were provided in total.

The sequences were all selected with reference to the Corpus of Contemporary American English - at a frequency of at least 10/million words and with a Mutual Information score (MI) of at least 3.0 in the corpus (for an overview of MI see Schmitt, 2010). Appendix 1 presents a full list of the sequences provided.

Participants were then encouraged to practice the presentation and include the formulaic sequences which had been provided, repeating them until they felt confident in using them. From one to three weeks elapsed between the provision of the formulaic sequences and the actual presentations. Participants were strongly advised not to memorize and entire text for their presentation, and to only use notes which contained point-form prompts.

The presentations were video recorded and the recorded speech was checked for the presence of the formulaic sequences which had been provided. Of the eight students who had chosen to participate in the study, three made deep changes to their presentations shortly before the presentation day, to the extent that it rendered the formulaic sequences irrelevant. These presentations were therefore not analyzed.

Results

Presentations

Of a total of 45 formulaic sequences provided to the remaining five participants, all were used in the presentations. Individual results are presented in Table 1. Student names are presented as abbreviations. In some instances the number of FS used exceeds the number provided because some sequences were used more than once in a presentation See appendix).

Table 1 Use of formulaic sequences in presentation

Participant	Number of formulaic sequences provided	Number of formulaic sequences used
A W	12	14 (2 sequences were used twice)
K M	7	7
S Y	8	7
Y O	8	7
Y U	10	10
Total	**45**	**45**

The participants who followed through on all stages of the research process used the formulaic sequences comprehensively in their presentations. It appears that practicing and memorizing formulaic sequences for a specific performance goal is a practical and effective way of improving communicative effectiveness for the target task itself.

Pre-post course freewriting

On the first day and the last day of class the students were asked to freewrite for ten minutes to the prompt "what is formulaic language and why is it important?" Freewriting is a process of fast, timed writing in which a writer puts thoughts on paper without the opportunity to preplan content or language. In this case, the freewriting was meant to capture the students' deep *sense* of formulaic language, not to test their recall of lecture or textbook content. In other words, the technique was designed to capture more what they had acquired about formulaic language than what they had learned or been taught. The freewriting samples were matched pre- and post course and were analyzed for evidence of a developing sense of the functional and communicative value of formulaic language. It was expected that the experience of the course, particularly the lectures and the coached final presentations, might have raised awareness of the communicative value of formulaic language.

A common theme in the first pre-course freewriting was the idiomatic nature of formulaic language, often referred to as "expressions," along with a perceived basis in cultural traditions, and even slang. Statements to these effects from the initial freewrites include:

- *It was passed from ancestor to us*

- *It's a traditional expression which old people have used for a long time*
- *Idioms are difficult for Japanese student*
- *Idioms combine two words*
- *It has a slangy expression*

Other perceptions of the function and nature of formulaic language included structural aspects, for example "we can modify easily, for example, we can just modify simple verbs when we don't know the past form," or a sense of the noncompositional nature of some sequences, as in "they are composed of some words … idiom has a completely different meaning."

A strikingly clear and salient broad theme from the post-course freewriting samples is the power of formulaic language to facilitate effective and fluent speech. Common statements to this effect include:

- *If we don't have FL, we can't speak or write speedily ... makes language better and comfortable*
- *There are a lot of cases that we can't explain in terms of grammatical rules, but these words are commonly used in daily communication by native speakers*
- *It help to speak fluently and naturally*
- *It help us to speak smoothly or understand easily*
- *We can communicate with each other efficiently, quickly, and easily*
- *A way of expressing how we feel or understanding socially*
- *We need not think about the grammatical system*
- *We can speak fluently by using it*

During the course students had a great deal of exposure to background information on the types and functions of formulaic language, and they had ample opportunity to study and manipulate formulaic sequences in practice and in the preparations for the final presentations. It is likely that this body of experience contributed to their final observations that formulaic language is a set of tools for efficient and effective communication, rather than a set of idioms, expressions, slang, or traditional ways of expression.

Discussion and Conclusions

The students who participated in the course and the cycle of FL-focused activity appear to have gained in two ways: their overall awareness of the value, functions, and uses of FL in communication expanded and deepened; their repertoire of FL for use in the expression of particular ideas was augmented. The former gain is evidenced by their freewriting, in which they express a broader range of attitudes and beliefs about FL after completing the course – particularly as regards the benefits of FL in facilitating overall speech proficiency and fluency. The latter gain, the increase in repertoire of FL, is present in their speech presentations, into which they integrated a new set of specific FSs after practice, repetition, and memorization.

Research of this type is fraught with difficulties and complications, yet it is essential that we continue to investigate how learners may benefit from specific pedagogical practices with regard to FL. In future, projects involving closely matched of genre and dynamics

between rehearsed and practiced performances and subsequent recalls might yield firmer results. However, the present study provides tantalizing preliminary evidence that utilizing the power of repetition and memory in speech tasks can augment facility with and awareness of FL; it remains for future research to determine how and to what extent this is so in a range of circumstances.

Appendix

Formulaic Sequences Provided for Presentations

1. a number of
2. a range of
3. according to
4. all in all
5. are generally defined as
6. as illustrated here
7. as many (examples) as possible
8. can be a source of difficulty
9. can be tricky
10. comes across
11. compiled a list
12. curious as to why
13. dealing with
14. direct our attention to
15. down through generations
16. draw out
17. for the most part
18. from (their) point of view
19. from our perspective
20. have the additional benefit of
21. highly unusual
22. how the X differ
23. in fact
24. in an instance in which
25. in the course of
26. initial reaction
27. it became apparent that
28. late by X minutes
29. launch into
30. looked down on
31. may appear similar
32. point out
33. present a comparison between
34. presents problems
35. some of which are
36. some such thing
37. such as
38. the truth is that
39. through the eyes of
40. to sum up
41. use in error
42. with particular attention to

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