

Processing English Formulaic Expressions in Situation-Bound Utterances: Strategies Used by Francophone ESL Learners in Thailand

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Abstract

In examining how English as a second language (ESL) learners process English formulaic expressions in a nonnative English context, this study aims to investigate the strategies that learners use and how first language (L1) culture and conceptual knowledge could influence the use of the strategies. This study is guided by the research question of how francophone ESL learners in Thailand process formulaic expressions in situation-bound utterances (SBUs). Three Francophone Cameroonian learners of English in a university in Thailand (served as the experimental group) and two native English speakers (as the control group) participated in this study. Oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed to elicit data and evaluated based on 4 categories: (1) Native-like English; (2) Towards Native-like English; (3) Francophone English; and (4) Irrelevant English. The result showed that among the three francophone participants in the study whose native languages were French, 60% DCT responses were Towards Native-like (TNE), 30% were Francophone English (FE), 10% were Native-like English (NE). There was no response from the DCTs, according to the analysis, that was irrelevant English. A further analysis of the three categories revealed that the learners primarily used simplification, verbosity, literal salience, and L1 cultural transfer strategies in processing formulaic expressions. This study corroborates the seemingly weak connection of English linguistic proficiency and sociolinguistic competence in ESL learner's pragmatic knowledge, as well as the reliance on L1 conventionalized conceptualization in processing English formulaic expressions. Implications for teaching formulaic expressions in a nonnative English as a foreign language (EFL) context in general, and Thai context in particular are also discussed.

Keywords: English formulaic expressions, situation-bound utterances, Francophone ESL learners' strategies

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