Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences and Perceived Oral Proficiency:
Assessing Young Learners in the Greek EFL Context

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Abstract

This study reports a small-scale experiment that was set up to estimate the extent to which (a) the use of formulaic sequences (multi-word units such as collocations, institutionalized utterances, and idiomatic expressions) can influence the degree of oral proficiency young L2 learners are perceived as exhibiting and (b) L2 learners who receive traditional instruction, where grammar and lexis are conceptualized and taught separately, can be differentiated from L2 learners who are exclusively taught with an instructional method that emphasizes ‘noticing’ of L2 formulaic sequences (FS), with reference to their receptive and productive knowledge and use of such phrases. Participants were 14 Greek EFL students attending the third grade of state primary school. Over the course of the school year the experimental students (N=7) were only exposed to the state school’s instructional materials (Magic Book 1) which made them aware of standardized phrases and only received implicit grammar teaching, while the control group (N=7) also received extra L2 classes which featured discrete point explicit grammar teaching and vocabulary instruction focusing on single words. Following instruction, the participants’ oral proficiency in an oral narrative was measured by two judges. The number of word combinations in the oral narratives considered to be formulaic sequences was counted along with learners’ scores on recognition and recall of formulaic sequences in a test designed to elicit them. The findings suggest that FS use contributes to all aspects of perceived L2 oral proficiency and that an exclusively lexical approach in language teaching is more effective in promoting young learners’ perceived oral proficiency and fluency, their recognition of formulaic sequences, and their recall of collocations, compared to traditional instruction which is coupled with awareness-raising of formulaic sequences.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The goal of second and foreign language teaching and learning is assumed to be linguistic proficiency, such that even if it does not match the one exhibited by native speakers of the target language, it is, nevertheless, still adequate to make communication smooth and efficient. Fluent idiomatic speech has been linked to the widespread use of formulaic sequences by native speakers (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Erman & Warren, 2000). These multi-word phrases are believed to be memorized and stored as wholes as opposed to being constructed creatively from grammar rules and the lexicon. Being prefabricated, they are believed to free up attentional resources and reduce cognitive load in oral production allowing for increased fluency (Skehan, 1998). They are the epitome of idiomatic language since they are institutionalized; the predictable thing to say at specific situations, they carry important pragmatic meaning, and realize recurrent communicative functions and needs (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Schmitt & Carter, 2004). Nevertheless, even advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners have considerable difficulty in both producing fluent stretches of spontaneous speech, and in producing natural idiomatic language. Actually, formulaic language is felt to be especially problematic for second language (L2) learners (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Granger, 1998), thus rendering their output unnatural and nonnative-like. Even though L2 learners do use formulaic language, they typically overuse, underuse, and misuse it (Foster, 2001; Granger, 1998; Oppenheim, 2000), whereas their intuitions about it are not as well-developed as those of native speakers (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). This picture can be said to apply for EFL learners in Greece,
too, despite the fact that they are taught English from a very young age at both state primary schools and private language schools and the fact that they sit for proficiency exams at impressive numbers.

Taking into account the difficulties L2 learners face regarding the use of formulaic language, a number of applied linguists have emphasized the need to draw language learners’ attention to formulaic language and to modify instructional practices so that they reflect an awareness-raising approach to these lexical items and the patterns they form (Lewis, 1993; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1988; Willis, 1990). Moreover, the traditional dichotomy of lexis and grammar as separate poles in language description and teaching is no longer valid for a number of scholars (e.g. Sinclair, 1991). On the contrary, the new age of corpus analysis in linguistics has offered insights that dictate a different view of language as grammaticalised lexis (Lewis, 1993) and phraseology (Sinclair, 1991) and emphasize the syntagmatic relations in language as well as linguistic phenomena such as collocation, idiom, lexical phrases, and standardized expressions and routines. Lewis (1993) argues that lexical phrases can be used to introduce a large number of patterns that are commonly treated as part of sentence grammar. Pedagogical chunking, the identification and noticing of these multi-word phrases by learners, is believed to enhance the incidental acquisition of the underlying patterns (Lewis, 1993). Likewise, Ellis (2005) maintains that formulaic expressions can serve as a resource for a subsequent development of a competence based on rules.

In addition to this trend, the past few decades have also seen a growing appreciation of the importance of lexis in language learning contrary to older attitudes. Vocabulary knowledge has not always been a priority in teaching second language learners. In fact, vocabulary, in contrast with grammar, was not traditionally given great attention and conscious effort in second language teaching. Recently, however, more and more
proponents of the usefulness of vocabulary knowledge suggest emphasizing the teaching of vocabulary in second language instruction. Lexical approaches in language teaching such as *The Lexical Syllabus* (Willis, 1990) and *The Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993) reflect the belief that lexis is the most integral part of language and language learning. Words are necessary if we want to convey meaning and vocabulary knowledge is believed to be critical for comprehension and communication in first and second language acquisition (SLA). This is reflected in material design; for example, Granger (2011) notes the increasing lexicalization of EFL teaching materials in recent times.

The insights resulting from the literature and research findings discussed above have informed the rationale for the creation of new language teaching materials for young learners of English in the Greek primary school. *Magic Book 1 and 2* have been designed in line with the principles of *The Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993) which emphasizes noticing of lexical phrases. They feature a richer lexical input, a principled selection of vocabulary informed by frequency and appropriacy criteria, an emphasis on contextualized lexical phrases rather than single words, and an implicit approach to the teaching of grammar through input abundant in lexical phrases and formulaic sequences. These characteristics are believed to result in increased oral fluency for these young EFL learners and, consequently, in greater motivation (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015). Moreover, these standardized sequences cannot be composed creatively or predicted by learners, so their learning can enhance their oral communicative ability and improve the naturalness of their output. In addition, mastery of formulaic sequences can aid the learner reach a degree of linguistic accuracy, which is beyond their internalized competence (Bolander, 1989). The present study aims to test these assumptions with empirical evidence. Are the young EFL learners taught with an approach emphasizing lexical phrases and formulaic language perceived as more proficient L2 speakers? Do
they exhibit increased fluency, accuracy, and range of expression in oral discourse and are these perceived characteristics of their speech related to their use of formulaic sequences? Do these young L2 learners acquire a repertoire of formulaic sequences as a result of the methodology and the instructional materials that emphasize their noticing? What is the nature of their formulaic knowledge and their stage in the process of acquisition?

In the Greek EFL context, all pupils of this age are nowadays taught with Magic Book 1 and Magic Book 2 materials at state schools. Nevertheless, there is also a large number of pupils who, in addition to their state school classes, also receive a more traditional EFL instruction in private tuition, which features a strong focus on the explicit teaching of sentence grammar in a discrete-point, linear fashion and the separate teaching of vocabulary consisting mainly of de-contextualized, individual words with much less attention given to lexical phrases and formulaic sequences. Thus, a comparison between these two groups of pupils is expected to shed some light into the effects of differential instruction on these young pupils’ perceived fluency and overall proficiency in oral communication, and on their acquisition of formulaic sequences.

Previous research that has studied the relationship between formulaic language and L2 learners’ oral proficiency and fluency suggests that use of formulaic language is critical for facilitating more fluent speech production (Dechert, 1983; Raupach, 1984; Wood, 2006). Furthermore, previous studies have evaluated the effects of a lexical approach in EFL instruction on learners’ performance. For example, Lewis’ (2000; 2002) colleagues report action research in which they applied insights from the Lexical Approach to their teaching and they report their modified practices to be perceived as more successful in improving their learners’ performance than their previous practices. Studies reported include practices such as the introduction of collocation to a class,
activities on delexicalised verbs, exploiting L2 learners’ notebooks, the teaching of pronunciation, and group writing activities (Lewis, 2000; 2002). These interventions, however, cannot offer empirical evidence on their learning benefits since they did not include comparisons under controlled conditions. The effects of a phrase-noticing emphasis in EFL instruction have, also, been previously tested in controlled empirical research for advanced adult learners in a university context (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, & Demecheleer, 2006). The results of this study suggest a positive impact of the technique on L2 learners’ perceived oral proficiency, perceived oral fluency, and perceived range of expression. However, to my knowledge, there is a lack of empirical research for young learners, especially for beginner learners in formal EFL classroom teaching contexts, that studies the effectiveness of an awareness-raising lexical approach and that can provide statistically significant findings from controlled experiments. Literature on second language acquisition abounds with findings that warn us against assuming that young and adult L2 learners acquire language and, formulaic language in particular, in a similar manner (Wray, 2000). These two categories of L2 learners are essentially different learners in a variety of ways, because of their different age, cognitive and analytic abilities, motivation, and learning styles. There is, finally, the need to replicate previous research studies in order to confirm the conclusions drawn for the effectiveness of an instructional approach that emphasizes formulaic sequences and syntagmatic relationships in language.

In conclusion, the intended aims of the study include the investigation of the effectiveness of a lexical approach in language teaching both for the acquisition of formulaic language by young EFL learners and for their performance in oral tasks as well as the investigation of the role of formulaic sequences in L2 young learner speech. The study is, furthermore, expected to enable comparisons between L2 learners of different
ages (young children and adult EFL learners) and different instructional contexts (state primary school, private language school, university). The insights that will be gained can be implemented in the design of instructional EFL materials and syllabuses and inform language teachers’ practices in their classroom teaching contexts.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduced the rationale of the study, the research question addressed, the aims, and the expected outcomes. The second chapter contains the theoretical and contextual framework of the research. It reviews the literature on the importance of lexis for language use and the nature of lexical knowledge, defines the phenomenon of formulaic language, and explores the functions of formulaic sequences and their role in language acquisition and performance. The characteristics of young L2 learners participating in this study and the Greek EFL context are also discussed. The third chapter deals with the methodology adopted in this study and provides information on the participants, the instructional practices and interventions, the measures, and the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter four presents the results of the selected measures including recognition and recall of formulaic language, use of formulaic language in spoken narratives, and perceived oral proficiency, and describes the statistical analyses applied. Chapter five discusses the significance of the findings and their relation to previous literature and research findings. Chapter six summarizes the conclusions of the study, discusses their limitations, and suggests implications for future research and language teaching pedagogy. This dissertation aims to make a contribution to the growing volume of research on formulaic language and especially hopes to provide directions for the development of teaching practices that can facilitate their L2 acquisition and use.
CHAPTER TWO
BACKGROUND TO LEXICAL KNOWLEDGE, FORMULAIC LANGUAGE, YOUNG LEARNERS AND THE GREEK EFL LEARNING CONTEXT

This chapter deals with lexis in language learning and use and discusses the nature of lexical knowledge. It, also, defines the phenomenon of formulaic language and considers its functions in interaction and performance. It, then, goes on to examine its role in language acquisition and the nature of its use by nonnative speakers. Finally, it describes the instructional approaches that emphasize the teaching of formulaic language and provides information on young learners and the EFL teaching context in Greece.

2.1 The Importance of Lexis

Learning vocabulary is nowadays unanimously accepted as a very significant aspect of learning a native or foreign language. But this has not always been so. Vocabulary used to be “a neglected aspect of language learning” (Meara, 1980, p. 221). Despite its evident usefulness “the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) throughout its varying stages” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 5) at the expense of research on syntax and phonology (Richards, 1976). The emphasis on the acquisition of syntax in applied linguistics resulted in neglecting vocabulary (Richards, 1976) since, as Sinclair and Renouf (1988, p. 143) comment “it is exceptionally difficult to teach an organized syllabus on both grammar and lexis at the same time”. In a historical review of language teaching methods, Zimmerman (1996) claims that despite its central role for language, vocabulary is not the primary focus in any of them except for some newer approaches, such as Willis’ (1990) *The Lexical Syllabus*, Lewis’ (1993) *The Lexical Approach*, and Nattinger and DeCarrico’s (1992) *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching*. 
The intuitive belief that vocabulary is a crucial component of language and that it is essential for communication is reflected in Wilkins’ oft cited quote: “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Wilkins, 1972, p. 111). These words illustrate a rejection within the tradition of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches of the traditional preoccupation with grammatical accuracy in language teaching and point to the superiority of lexis for meaningful communication. For instance, The Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) prioritized vocabulary and the ability to communicate messages over grammatical accuracy in the early stages of learning:

Vocabulary is basic to communication. If acquirers do not recognize the meaning of the key words used by those who address them they will be unable to participate in the conversation. If they wish to express some idea or ask for information they must be able to produce lexical items to convey their meaning. Indeed, if our students know the morphology and the syntax of an utterance addressed to them, but do not know the meaning of key lexical items, they will be unable to participate in the communication. For this reason, we are not impressed with approaches that deliberately restrict vocabulary acquisition and learning until the morphology and syntax are mastered. (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 155).

In his famous Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1982) stresses the significance for acquisition of the provision of a sufficient amount of comprehensible input, slightly above the learners’ current level of competence. In the preface of The Natural Approach, Krashen and Terrell (1983) actually state that this is the only way in which language acquisition occurs: “We acquire language when we obtain comprehensible input, when we understand what we hear or read in another language”. This is why they believe that “vocabulary is also very important for the acquisition process” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983,
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Their model of acquisition suggests the use of top-down processes to extract patterns from meaningful input: “The popular belief is that one uses form and grammar to understand meaning. The truth is probably closer to the opposite: we acquire morphology and syntax because we understand the meaning of utterances” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 155). This may be another reason why emphasizing grammatical structures and rules in second language teaching at the expense of vocabulary learning is not consistent with the true nature of the learning task. However, even CLT approaches failed to address vocabulary in a principled way and assumed that vocabulary would be acquired on its own without precise and detailed guidelines similarly to vocabulary first language acquisition (Coady, 1993).

More recently, a number of research studies have found evidence for the importance of vocabulary in language use. To begin with, in the process of developing the DIALANG tests, Alderson and his research team compared vocabulary scores with scores from the other language components of the tests and found vocabulary size to contribute to a large extent to performance on any language skill and test, including reading, listening, and writing (Alderson, 2005). They, therefore, concluded that “language ability is to a large extent a function of vocabulary size” (Alderson, 2005, p. 88). Reading ability, in particular, has been found to correlate highly with vocabulary size for second language learners in a number of studies (Albrechtsen, Haastrup, & Henriksen, 2008; Laufer, 1992). Indeed, Meara (1996) agrees that “there is some evidence to support the view that vocabulary skills make a significant contribution to almost all aspects of L2 proficiency” (p. 37).

Another reason that learning vocabulary is important is the sheer volume of vocabulary that is necessary for successful language use and communication. The adult educated native speaker of English is reported to have a vocabulary size ranging from
Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences

16,000 to 20,000 word families (Schmitt, 2010) and English native speakers are believed to add around 1,000 word families a year to their vocabulary knowledge (Nation & Waring, 1997). Therefore, some second language learners might be able to acquire a native-like vocabulary size, although this goal will not be attainable for all of them. Even though native-like proficiency may not be a realistic or desirable goal for most English second language learners, they still have to master a great amount of lexis for language use. More specifically, for oral communication in informal everyday contexts knowledge of 6,000 to 7,000 word families is believed to be necessary, while for reading a range of authentic texts, such as newspapers or novels, 8,000 to 9,000 word families are needed (Nation, 2006). As a result, students are faced with a great learning challenge, even if we do not take into account the huge number of lexical phrases that the English language contains and the fact that they have to be learned and stored separately (Wray, 2002), or the number of derivations and inflections included in every word family. In fact, studies have shown that second language learners’ vocabulary sizes are smaller than what is required for daily language use and communication (Milton & Meara, 1998).

The prodigious size of the vocabulary learning task and learners’ apparent inability to confront it argue for a more thoughtful and principled approach to vocabulary teaching in contemporary methodology. It appears that language instruction must address the task of vocabulary teaching explicitly especially at the early stages of EFL learning, because learners seem to fail to simply pick up the necessary vocabulary through context alone during activities with a different focus, such as reading, grammar exercises or speaking tasks focusing on communication (Coady, 1993; Lewis, 1993; Nation, 1990). However, since it is impossible to teach explicitly the very large vocabulary needed for language use, explicit treatment should be combined with exposure to large amounts of language input in order to facilitate implicit acquisition (Coady, 1993; Nation, 1990). On
the other hand, the task of internalizing the grammar of a language seems less daunting. It is usually acquired by the time the child is around ten years old (Crystal, 1987), since it is made up of finite rules, whereas speakers continue to acquire new vocabulary throughout their lives.

2.2 Nature of Lexical Knowledge

The following section will discuss the incremental nature of vocabulary knowledge and will attempt to clarify some useful distinctions, such as receptive versus productive knowledge and breadth versus depth of vocabulary knowledge.

2.2.1 The Incremental Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition

In addition to the demanding task of acquiring the necessary vocabulary size to communicate successfully in a language, learners also need to know a lot about each lexical item, especially if they are to use it effectively in communication (Schmitt, 2010). As we have already seen English native speakers are believed to add around 1,000 word families a year to their vocabulary knowledge (Nation & Waring, 1997). Likewise, L2 learners have been found to gradually increase the size of their vocabulary in a consistent way (Henriksen, 2008). Therefore, an important concept concerning lexical knowledge is its incremental nature both with reference to vocabulary size, but more importantly, with reference to the acquisition of each lexical item (Schmitt, 2010). That is to say, words are not acquired immediately from one sole exposure, but multiple exposures are necessary for acquisition (Nation, 2001) and the various types of knowledge of a lexical item are gradually learned over time. There are, therefore, different degrees of knowing a word.
2.2.2 Receptive and Productive Lexical Knowledge

Lexical knowledge includes the ability to understand a word in reading or listening called *receptive* or *passive knowledge* and the ability to produce a word in speaking or writing, which is called *productive* or *active knowledge*. It is generally believed that receptive knowledge develops before productive knowledge (Fan, 2000; Laufer, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). It seems logical that the learner needs to have established a link between the meaning and the form of a lexical item before they can use it actively in their own output. However, it should also be taken into account whether it is the spoken or the written mode that one is concerned with (Schmitt, 2010). Learners are generally expected to have a greater receptive than productive vocabulary, but there seems to be some overlap in the acquisition of receptive and productive knowledge for lexical items. For instance, young learners may not be able to read the written forms yet, but they may be able to pronounce the words. Learners may, therefore, have partial receptive or productive knowledge or they can know a word productively before mastering it receptively.

Although the development of vocabulary knowledge is nowadays seen as proceeding from receptive to productive mastery, research has not yet determined the exact route of this movement, or specified the input that is essential for this change (Schmitt, 2010). Some scholars have described these two types of knowledge as ranging along a continuum (Melka, 1997), supporting the view that the transition to productive mastery is aided by increasing knowledge, while others (Meara, 1990) claim that these two aspects of knowledge are essentially different. Studies that have compared receptive versus productive mastery of meaning concur that receptive mastery generally develops before productive mastery (Fan, 2000; Laufer, 2005).
2.2.3 Depth of Lexical Knowledge

Another useful distinction is between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. More specifically, *breadth* of word knowledge or vocabulary *size* refers to the number of words a learner knows, while *depth* of knowledge refers to what the learner knows about these words (Anderson & Freebody, 1981). Nation (1990, p. 31) has categorized the various types of word knowledge that are included in knowing a word:

- the meaning(s) of the word
- the written form of the word
- the spoken form of the word
- the grammatical behavior of the word
- the collocations of the word
- the register of the word
- the associations of the word
- the frequency of the word

Later, Nation (2001) revised the above list categorizing word knowledge into three areas: knowledge of *form*, knowledge of *meaning* and of *use*. These areas are further subcategorized as can be seen in Figure 1 illustrating the fact that word knowledge is a rich and complex construct.
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Figure 1: What is involved in knowing a word (Nation, 2001, p. 27)

According to Milton (2009, p. 71) “passive recognition is likely to be the most basic, catch-all definition of word knowledge”. All other aspects of word knowledge illustrated in Nation’s table (2001) presuppose this basic knowledge. However, other components of word knowledge also appear crucial for the use of vocabulary in discourse. The patterns in which the word occurs in, the collocations it forms, the intuitions about the relative frequency, formality, and register of a word are all very significant components of word knowledge, particularly if the words are to be used productively in communication, and, more importantly, seem to be what differentiates the way language is used and perceived by native speakers and foreign language learners. For instance, L2 learners’ less effective lexical use may lie in their inaccurate intuitions about word frequency (Schmitt, 2000). L2 learners sound unlike native speakers due to their tendency to overuse some relatively infrequent vocabulary and to underuse vocabulary.
which is more frequent. For example, they typically avoid using delexicalised phrasal verbs and instead use single lexical items that include more lexical content (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007). Thus, they appear to be lacking in their knowledge of register information of words, since more frequent words are considered colloquial and less frequent ones tend to be more formal (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007).

Although learners are presented with all these types of knowledge of lexical items simultaneously, some of them are mastered sooner than others (Schmitt, 1998). Word form and meaning appear to be acquired first and their learning can be a result of explicit teaching, whereas more contextualized aspects, such as collocational behavior, register constraints, and frequency information, are acquired later, appear to be more resistant to teaching, and require more input and exposure to the L2 so that their characteristics can be determined (Schmitt, 2010). What is more, each separate type of knowledge seems to develop in an incremental manner as well. Henriksen (1999) proposes that all word knowledge develops along a continuum and moves from no knowledge to partial knowledge and, finally, to fully developed knowledge.

In conclusion, the acquisition of vocabulary develops incrementally in a threefold way. Firstly, some aspects of lexical knowledge develop before others. Secondly, every individual aspect of word knowledge itself develops gradually. Thirdly, each word knowledge type differs in the degree of its receptive and productive mastery. Therefore, vocabulary development is a complex and gradual process and conclusions regarding the learning of a lexical item should be cautious and should take into consideration this incremental property (Schmitt, 2010).
2.3 Formulaic Language

Traditionally, vocabulary was seen as individual words and language teaching has centered on the teaching of these as the most basic lexical units (Schmitt, 2010). This approach is understandable since individual words are more salient and easier to teach than formulaic language. During the past decades, however, a number of applied linguists have maintained that formulaic language is so omnipresent that it must be acknowledged as a core aspect of language use (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Sinclair, 1991) in a number of different languages (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008) and should, thus, be given prominence in language instruction (Lewis, 1993; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). Vocabulary can no longer be viewed merely as single words which are connected by syntax, but as groups of words which tend to form phrases in discourse. The following section will attempt to define and delineate the phenomenon as well as highlight the link between formulaic language and fluent, communicative language use.

2.3.1 Characteristics and Definitions of Formulaic Language

Pawley and Syder (1983) were among the first to connect the notion of formulaicity with native speaker idiomaticity and fluency. They noticed that native speakers are able to select the most natural and idiomatic expressions to convey their intended meanings from a range of grammatical options with the same meaning. For instance, native speakers use certain standardized phrases such as *How are you?* or *Will you marry me?* instead of being creative and employing the great number of grammatical and lexical choices available. What is more, they do so while producing fluent stretches of spontaneous speech despite the fact that human resources for encoding speech in advance or while speaking are extremely limited. Besides, speakers’ attentional resources are also taken up by requirements other than mere grammaticality, such as choosing the
appropriate register, making coherent, logical and witty contributions, displaying sensitivity to the audience and the social situation (Pawley & Syder, 1983) and many more. Taking into consideration that *nativelike selection* and *nativelike fluency* (Pawley & Syder, 1983) constitute goals that are rarely achieved by second and foreign language learners, formulaic language has spurred a lot of interest in the field of second language acquisition and teaching. In fact, Pawley and Syder (1983, p. 199) note that “fluency in spontaneous connected speech may take the adult learner of a foreign language years to achieve”. In order to account for these ‘puzzles’, they propose that native speakers possess memorized sequences and lexicalised sentence stems that are stored holistically in long term memory, rather than produced creatively online using grammatical rules and the lexicon. Other scholars had previously introduced similar concepts, such as holophrases (Corder, 1973), prefabricated routines and patterns (Hakuta, 1974), formulaic speech (Wong Fillmore, 1976) and gestalt versus analytic language (Peters, 1977).

Formulaic language is believed to represent a great percentage of both spoken and written discourse. Even though the figure is not yet determined precisely with research evidence (Schmitt, 2010), there seems to be agreement that its use is widespread and pervasive (Sinclair, 1991). The fact that formulaic language has been found in a number of different languages, such as French, Russian, Greek, Chinese, Hebrew and others (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008) suggests that it might be a universal linguistic phenomenon. Pawley and Syder (1983, p. 213) remark that the number of “sentence-length expressions familiar to the ordinary, mature English speaker probably amounts, at least, to several hundreds of thousands”. Altenberg (1998) concludes that “what is perhaps the most striking impression that emerges... is the pervasive and varied nature of conventionalized language in spoken discourse... from entire utterances operating at discourse level to smaller units acting as single words and phrases” (p. 121). Oppenheim (2000) calculated
that an overall mean of 66% of spoken discourse (ranging between 48% and 80%) produced by nonnative participants consisted of identical word strings. In their study, Erman and Warren (2000) have estimated that 52-58% of the language they analyzed was formulaic, while Foster (2001) calculated 32% using different identification criteria and methodology.

Indeed, formulaic language is such a varied and ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon that definitions have been difficult to arrive at and terminology has not been consistent causing confusion and making comparisons across research studies problematic (Schmitt, 2010). Wray (2002, p. 9) found over fifty terms to refer to standardized and recurrent lexical items with a single meaning or function, including chunks, collocations, multi-word units, idioms, ready-made forms etc. Schmitt (2004) uses the term formulaic sequences (FS) as an umbrella term for all these diverse manifestations of formulaic language and I will adopt this practice in the present study. The numerous terms highlight some of the key characteristics of these lexical items: they are made up of multiple words, they are relatively fixed, they occur repeatedly as phrases, and they are stored and processed in the mind as wholes (Schmitt, 2010). Most definitions stress the fact that they consist of more than single words and that they are stored and processed holistically, without analysis (Wood, 2006).

Formulaic sequences vary considerably both in terms of their linguistic makeup and with reference to the functions they realize in discourse. They can range from very short phrases (Oh, no!) to lengthy proverbs and standardized expressions (You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink; There is a growing body of evidence that). They include collocations (tell a story; hard work), discourse fillers (sort of), idioms (back to square one), proverbs (Let’s make hay while the sun shines), and institutionalized phrases (They lived happily ever after). They, furthermore, realize an
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array of communicative purposes allowing speakers to satisfy recurrent communicative needs with precision and clarity (Schmitt, 2010), such as expressing a message or idea (the early bird catches the worm = do not procrastinate), realizing a specific function or speech act (Excuse me), and expressing social solidarity (Nice weather today; How interesting) (Schmitt, 2010). The fact that some of these sequences are completely fixed (Ladies and Gentlemen), whereas others allow for some variation (Moon, 1997) and have a number of slots that need to be filled with appropriate words or phrases ([someone/thing, usually with authority] made it plain that [something as yet unrealized was intended or desired]) contributes to the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. Finally, some formulaic sequences are semantically opaque or non-compositional (e.g. idioms), while others carry meaning which can be computed from the meaning of their constituent parts.

Wray (2000) highlights the fact that in order to appreciate the phenomenon of formulaicity in its entirety we need to include both semantically opaque idioms (e.g. beat about the bush) and syntactically irregular expressions (e.g. by and large), as well as sequences that are semantically transparent and syntactically regular (e.g. It was lovely to see you). In the first case, the expressions cannot be constructed based on either their lexical components or their grammar, but in the latter they could be generated from scratch at the time of their use. In other words, even if the second type of sequences need not be formulaic, they can, nevertheless, be potentially stored and processed as wholes (Sinclair, 1991) given the advantages they can confer to speakers in communication.

Indeed, Wray (2002) defines a formulaic sequence as:

A sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at
the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar (p. 9).

This definition reflects the vagueness and subjectivity surrounding formulaic sequences, since what is processed holistically by one speaker may not be processed in the same way by another. Indeed, psycholinguistic experiments have found that second language learners process lexical items that constitute formulaic sequences for native speakers by analysing them into their constituent words and not holistically (Schmitt & Underwood, 2004; Underwood, Schmitt, & Galpin, 2004). It may be the case that ‘holistic processing’ is not an absolute quality but a matter of degree (Boers et al., 2006). Moreover, even though these sequences are stored as wholes, they can be subject to analysis and can be composed by their constituent parts (Peters, 1983).

2.3.2 Functions of Formulaic Sequences

Formulaic sequences have considerable pragmatic value as they accomplish a number of important communicative functions. Wray and Perkins (2000) review literature on the functions of formulaic language and conclude that it is typically categorized on the grounds of its effects on interaction on the one hand, and processing advantages on the other hand. They observe that these two functions are interrelated and propose a single model that can accommodate both. More specifically, they argue that when a speaker uses formulaic sequences to reduce the processing load, they are interested in being fluent, in reducing pauses, and in conveying a message in a reliable and effective way. They are, thus, interested in improving their linguistic production. On the other hand, when a speaker uses a formulaic sequence for socio-interactional reasons, they are aiming at creating an impact on the hearer by way of assisting their comprehension. The emphasis here is placed on whether the speaker will succeed in having an effect on the hearer, for
example, whether the hearer will respond to a request or a threat, or identify the speaker’s identity as intended by him or her. To their mind, this can explain the fact that the categories seem to overlap and also the reason why discourse markers can feature in both categories. They simultaneously enhance both speaker production and hearer comprehension by means of organizing a smooth sequence of ideas, characterizing and providing commentary on the speaker’s message, and indicating the appropriate position for beginning a turn (Wray & Perkins, 2000).

2.3.2.1 Interactional Functions

Every culture has a number of conventional situations or functions that necessitate the use of certain institutionalized formulae and phrases in order to be fulfilled. Speakers of a language community have agreed upon attaching specific language to these needs and activities, and anticipate its use, which makes communication easy and efficient. Therefore, formulaic sequences are conventional linguistic means that are typically used in speech acts, such as apologizing, offering, making requests, thanking and so on (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). For example, we typically use the phrase *I’m (very) sorry to hear about X* to express sympathy and *I’d be happy/ glad to X* to reply positively to a request (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). Let us note that original expressions, such as *I am feeling apologetic towards you*, will normally fail to realize speech acts and will sound unnatural. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) further argue that formulaic language satisfies conversational needs, such as maintaining conversations (*How are you?, See you later*), describing the purpose of conversation (*Would you like to X?, I’m sorry to hear about X*), and providing the topic of conversation, such as location or time (*How far is X?, When is X?*).
In their taxonomy Wray and Perkins (2000) have identified three types of socio-interactional functions for formulaic sequences, which pertain to how speakers want to interact and be viewed by others. The first type aims at the manipulation of others in order to satisfy physical, emotional or cognitive needs and is exemplified by sequences such as commands, requests, and phrases that can signal politeness. The other two functions relate to the speaker’s personal identity and the way he or she wants to manipulate the way the hearer perceives it, namely as individual or as being characterized by membership in a group. More specifically, the second type of functions can be used to assert the speaker’s separate identity, as in the case of idiosyncratic expressions, sequences that claim a turn in discourse, and storytelling skills. With the third type of formulaic sequences, the speaker may fulfill the need to assert group identity, either by highlighting membership in the group like when one uses proverbs, fashionable phrases, rituals and group chants, or by affirming or adjusting the place of personal identity in a hierarchy, as in the case of threats, address forms, and hedges.

Schmitt (2010) categorizes the functions of formulaic sequences in interaction in four categories: functional use, social interaction or phatic communion, discourse organization, and precise information transfer. Functional use reflects the taxonomy of functions proposed by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992). The function of social interaction or phatic communion illustrates the common practice of using language to express social solidarity rather than to communicate meaning or to manipulate the hearer’s actions. People use everyday conversation as a means of spending pleasurable time with other people in a non-threatening way. This function can be accomplished with standard conventional formulae, such as comments about the weather (Nice weather today), phrases used to agree with another speaker (Oh, I see what you mean) or to show interest and give positive feedback to an interlocutor (Did you really?, How interesting).
Consequently, these sequences are very frequent and important in informal spoken discourse (McCarthy & Carter, 2002). Moreover, formulaic sequences are typically used as discourse markers to organize both written (in addition, in conclusion) and spoken discourse (as I was saying). Finally, formulaic sequences carry denotative meaning and can be used to express a concept or a general truth or advice concisely (Too many cooks spoil the broth). In the case of technical vocabulary these multi-word strings enable the communication of precise information easily and efficiently (Schmitt & Carter, 2004).

Besides, the way words in phrases occur sequentially in the chain of speech or writing contributes to their meaning. As Firth (1935) suggested, part of a word’s meaning can be determined from the sequences that include it. Collocation is a reliable way to distinguish synonyms depending on their typical collocates (Partington, 1998), while typical co-text can assist in categorizing the different senses of polysemous words (Hoey, 2005). In addition, formulaic sequences can be characterized by collocational or semantic prosody (Sinclair, 2004), which can be negative (cause pain) or positive (provide information). Semantic prosody is a means of expressing a speaker’s or writer’s attitude or evaluation. For example, the sequence it is possible to implies that the speaker is reluctant to take responsibility for a suggestion (Biber, Conrad, & Cortes, 2004). Furthermore, formulaic sequences can reflect both an author’s distinctive writing style (Gläser, 1998), as well as the ideas of an entire culture (Teliya, Bragina, Oparina, & Sandomirskaya, 1998).

2.3.2.2 Saving Processing Effort

Another important function of formulaic language is that it helps speakers to be fluent by saving processing effort. Speakers have limited cognitive resources when processing language and, so, they need to make use of a repertoire of prefabricated
phrases which are memorized in long-term memory and stored as wholes, to assist them in the fluent production of long stretches of speech beyond the limitations of working memory (Pawley & Syder, 1983). These sequences are believed to ease the processing effort because they can be processed more quickly and easily than creative sequences of words (Pawley & Syder, 1983). As a result, speakers make fewer and shorter pauses between chunks in order to plan their linguistic output. In addition, these chunks can facilitate comprehension, because listeners and readers are believed to exhibit sensitivity to their use and to process them more quickly and easily as well (Ellis, 2006). Besides, normal conversation places significant demands on speakers beyond the mere formulation of oral discourse. Speakers need to attend to a number of higher-order issues such as speaker intentions and goals, expressing social solidarity or distance, and speaker identity. Formulaic language has been found to ease processing particularly during demanding simultaneous tasks (Wray, 1990; 1992).

These advantages are believed to hold not only for continuous sequences, but also for sequences with slots that can be filled by a number of lexical options, such as lexicalised sentence stems (Pawley & Syder, 1983). For example, Pawley and Syder note that NP be TENSE- sorry to keep- TENSE you waiting (1983, p. 210) can result in the production of a number of utterances when aspects such as tense, morphology, person, and number are provided for (e.g. I’m sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Smith will be sorry to have kept you waiting and so on). Some of these sequences with slots have semantic or collocational restrictions for the lexical items that can fill their gaps. For example, Schmitt (2005) mentions the sequence something/ someone (be) bordered/ bordering on- an undesirable state (often of mind). Therefore, both fixed and variable sequences are believed to offer processing advantages compared to language which is constructed from syntactic rules and the lexicon via a creative process.
Research findings on the psycholinguistic processing of collocations and other formulaic language validate the claim that it is processed more quickly than non-formulaic language (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Ellis, 2006). Research into the processing of idioms found that idiomatic expressions, such as *kick the bucket*, were judged more quickly as meaningful phrases compared to non-idiomatic control strings, like *lift the bucket* (Swinney & Cutler, 1979) and are comprehended at least as easily as literal speech (Gibbs, Bogdanovich, Sykes, & Barr, 1997). Eye-movement studies (Underwood, Schmitt, & Galpin, 2004) and studies with self-paced reading tasks (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008) show that FS are read more quickly than non-formulaic equivalents. In addition, grammaticality judgements were faster and more accurate for FS than for matched control strings which were not formulaic (Jiang & Nekrasova, 2007).

Finally, research on actual speech of fluent speakers, such as sports announcers and auctioneers, who need to talk effortlessly and fluently under conditions of restricted time, found that a large proportion of their speech was formulaic (Kuiper, 1996; 2004). With reference to second language learners, Dechert (1983) studying a German learner of English also found that her speech was more fluent and smoother when she incorporated formulaic language in it. Dechert (1983) insightfully characterized formulaic sequences as representing ‘islands of reliability’ for learners, highlighting their assistance for the planning and production of fluent and accurate speech in real time.

Wray and Perkins (2000) further subcategorize processing functions of formulaic sequence into three types. The first is the processing short-cuts, which are believed to result in increased fluency and speed of production, with the use of standard phrases, both fixed and with gaps, and collocations. In fact, research on brain activity in novel and familiar linguistic tasks has verified these processing gains and has highlighted the fact that practiced routines, such as narrative retellings, do not just speed up the processing
route that is followed, but they actually circumvent it (McCrone, 1999; Raichle, 1998). The second type is formulaic sequences that enable speakers to buy time in order to plan their production without losing their turn, such as fillers (if you want my opinion), turn-holders (and let me just say), repetitions of preceding input, and rhetorical markers (Firstly...Secondly...Thirdly...) that can shape discourse, or in order to be more fluent and emphatic, such as lexical phrases (it should be noted that) and collocations (valid point) which can enable speakers to use them as a basis to construct more extended stretches of discourse (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). The third type of processing functions is the manipulation of information through mnemonics, lengthy memorized texts, and rehearsal of information.

2.3.3 Formulaic Sequences in Language Acquisition

2.3.3.1 First Language Acquisition

As all vocabulary acquisition, the acquisition of FS develops incrementally (Nation, 1990). Speakers need to be exposed to a FS a number of times before they can master it. Evidence for this partial and gradual mastery comes from Wray (2002), who found that L1 acquirers may have sketched an initial phonological knowledge of the whole of a FS, but may lack such knowledge about its individual parts, especially the unstressed phonemic components, which can be filled sequentially. Moreover, the individual words or syntactic structure of a FS is very likely to be unknown initially, especially for child first language acquirers and beginning second language learners, but can possibly be derived later through analysis into its component parts (Peters, 1983). In addition, FS that include slots which can be filled are believed to be learned gradually. These flexible sequences must be learned as fixed at first, and later the properties that determine the amount of variability of the sequences are mastered as a result of more
input and exposure (Schmitt, 2010). Also, shorter FS can be combined and used as building blocks to form longer ones (Peters, 1983), so the acquisition of more complex FS follows the acquisition of their component FS.

The mechanics of storage and retrieval of formulaic sequences from memory have been proposed by scholars. For example, Weinert (1995) suggests that the sequences are retrieved based on the linear order of their components or by phonological units. Schmidt (1990) claims that noticing of formulaic sequences in input can enable speakers to recognize a pattern. If there is subsequent provision of frequent input, speakers will become able to access it in memory in a single step and frequent processing in working memory will eventually lead to automatization (Logan, 1988). Weinert (1995) supports the view that formulaic language develops as a result of the perception of the meaning of language chunks in input and their storage as wholes followed by a synthesis of formulaic sequences.

It is generally acknowledged that formulaic sequences feature prominently in first language acquisition. Children acquiring their first language habitually imitate chunks of adult utterances which they perceive as wholes and which are beyond their grammatical and lexical linguistic competence (Wray, 2000). Drawing from evidence from a number of studies, Wray (2000) argues that these formulaic sequences can assist L1 learners to become fluent and use grammatically accurate speech before they have mastered the internal composition of a sequence. More importantly, she argues that for L1 acquirers these formulaic sequences which are connected to a familiar situation can also provide linguistic material that can later be broken down into their constituent parts and used creatively in new combinations furthering the child’s lexical and grammatical development. Wood (2002, p. 5) argues that formulaic sequences “are segmented and analyzed, broken down, and combined as cognitive skills of analysis and synthesis grow.”
Both the original formulas and the pieces and rules that come from analysis are retained”. Wray (2002) suggests that L1 children will only analyze sequences when this process can facilitate communication and will, otherwise, process these forms holistically.

2.3.3.2 Second Language Acquisition

Formulaic sequences are seen as the distinctive characteristic of child second language development (McLaughlin, 1995), but they also feature prominently in novice adult’s second language learning (Ellis, 1996; 2003). However, mastery of formulaic language seems to take a long time to develop and features late in the necessary stages of linguistic proficiency (Schmitt, 2010).

L2 learners have been found to rely on FS in order to achieve the maximum communicative competence they can with the limited linguistic resources they possess. Wong Fillmore (1976) has found that some of the strategies young Mexican children used in their efforts to adjust to an English school environment involved use of formulaic sequences. Likewise, Bolander (1989) studied adult L2 learners and found that the formulaic sequences they used contained structures that the learners had not acquired yet. Bygate (1988) found that Swedish learners used formulaic sequences for their pragmatic value in a range of functions like repeating, questioning, clarifying, agreeing, confirming, and focusing attention.

In linguistic performance formulaic language appears to aid learners become more fluent and save processing effort. Yorio (1980) found that formulaic language was used as a strategy in production to ease the cognitive burden in speaking. Raupach (1984) found that the formulaic sequences used by L2 learners enabled them to buy time and attention to expect the next utterance in conversation because they had the effect of realizing functions and served as complete clauses. For these learners formulaic
sequences are believed to provide the structure upon which novel items can be subsequently added. Dechert (1980) studied L2 learners’ narrative retells and concluded that the most fluent speakers relied heavily on specific language and ideas and constructed their spoken outputs around these ‘islands of reliability’. Furthermore, Wood (2006) analyzed the oral narratives of L2 learners and found that more and better use of formulaic sequences functioned as a means of improving fluency over a six-month period. These learners utilized a number of strategies involving use of formulaic sequences so as to increase the length of their runs in speech and to avoid pausing, such as repeating a formulaic sequence in a run successively, combining several short sequences to extend a run of speech, relying on the repetition of specific formulas in their speech, using sequences in self-talk and in fillers, and using formulaic sequences as rhetorical devices to mark their discourse.

It seems that for L2 child learners at least, in addition to their communicative value, formulaic sequences can function as a means of accessing the grammar and the lexicon (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002; Myles, Hooper, & Mitchell, 1998). These chunks are believed to provide the raw material that child L2 learners can segment into smaller units and then use more creatively facilitating further language development. Furthermore, more automatic use of formulaic sequences is believed to save processing effort (Ellis, 1996; Kuiper, 1996) and, therefore, benefit other aspects of language learning that learners need to attend to (Schmitt, 2010).

On the other hand, even though formulaic sequences are used early by novice adult learners, as these learners advance their linguistic proficiency, they seem to fail to use formulaic sequences as a resource to produce more accurate and appropriate language (Schmidt, 1983) in the way native speakers do. For example, Irujo (1993) found that formulaic language was not as developed as much as other linguistic aspects in L2
learners, while Yorio (1989) “[did] not appear to find extensive use of prefabricated language in untutored adult learners” (p. 57) in a naturalistic learning context. In addition, L2 learners’ range of formulaic sequences does not match native speaker use (Irujo, 1993). In contrast, L2 learners in classroom settings have been found to use formulaic sequences to maintain interaction (Bolander, 1989; Bygate, 1988; DeCock, Granger, Leech, & McEnery, 1998; Myles et al., 1998) and to improve their accuracy in language use (Biskup, 1992; Weinert, 1995). Wray (2000) concludes that naturalistic adult L2 learners do not instinctively use formulaic word strings to deduce grammatical or lexical information in the way younger L2 learners can, but only use them as a survival communication strategy (Rehbein, 1987).

The difficulties L2 learners face with formulaic language are usually attributed to a lack of sufficient language input. Irujo (1986) suggests that one particular category of formulaic language, namely idioms, is not usually included in the input addressed to L2 learners, and this lack of input is essentially the reason why learners fail to acquire them and use them in their own production. Wood (2002) adds that a large amount of exposure to authentic, native-like input needs to be combined with extensive practice in spontaneous communication because “it is only in spontaneous communication that the immediate and flexible selection of formulaic sequences becomes apparent” (Wood, 2002, p. 10). However, formulaic sequences are not taught successfully (Granger, 1998; Irujo, 1986) or there is erroneous selection of sequences to be taught (Williams, 1988) in classroom teaching contexts. Willis (1990) notes that classroom teaching cannot successfully simulate the real world experience of language learning, which allows native speakers to notice and replicate the forms conventionally used in their speech community. Formulae encode a great amount of cultural information (Kuiper & Tan Gek Lin, 1989), which is not available in foreign and second language learners’ instructional experience.
As a result, learners have no means of knowing which grammatically correct sequences are actually preferred by native speakers. This observation is supported by research findings such as those in the study of Durrant and Schmitt (2009), who found that L2 learners produced frequent collocation pairs, but were unable to produce rare ones, and Siyanova and Schmitt (2008), who found that learners who had spent a year in an English-speaking country and, were, consequently, exposed to a significant amount of input in English, were able to exhibit improved intuitions of collocation.

Nevertheless, the quality of input is believed to be equally, if not more, important than the amount of input. Exposure to rich native input may not be enough on its own to make a difference for learners’ output. For instance, Siyanova and Schmitt (2007) found that the amount of exposure of L2 learners to native-speaking contexts did not enhance the chances of them using multi-word verbs. Adolphs and Durow (2004) suggest that in their case study sociocultural integration was what determined the learner’s success in acquisition. Likewise, Dornyei, Durow and Zahran (2004) agree that sociocultural adaptation, the extent to which L2 learners adopt the cultural and social traits of a linguistic environment, was a crucial factor in successful L2 formulaic language acquisition for the international students they investigated, which surpassed the effect of learner characteristics such as motivation and language aptitude.
2.3.4 Nonnative Use of Formulaic Sequences

Nonnative speakers’ linguistic output is often seen as sounding ‘foreign’ or unnatural compared to native speakers’ output, even though it may be grammatical (Granger, 1998; Pawley & Syder, 1983), and this is believed to be owing to the difficulties they face in their use of formulaic and idiomatic language. L2 learners differ from native speakers with reference to the amount of use, the appropriacy of use, and the goodness and speed of their subconscious intuitions of formulaic sequences (Schmitt, 2010).

2.3.4.1 Amount of Use

It should not be assumed that nonnative learners simply use less formulaic language than natives. A comparison of formulaic sequences in a native speaker academic corpus and the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) showed that there were actually more instances of overuse than of underuse of sequences (Granger, Paquot, & Rayson, 2006). In fact, learners can sound nonnative because they have either too few or too many FS in their output (Granger, 1998). This means that learners overuse a number of favorite sequences that they know well, but tend to avoid other sequences, which they do not know well and for whose use they feel unsure of (Foster, 2001; Granger, 1998). Nonnative usage, therefore, depends upon which kind of FS one is concerned with. For example, Altenberg and Granger (2001) found that L2 learners have significant difficulty with delexicalised uses of the verb make, such as make a decision and make a claim. This finding is alarming if we take into account the fact that high frequency verbs, like make, do, and look, form a great number of formulaic sequences. Even though EFL learners use frequent premodifier-noun collocations (hard work, good example) in ways similar to natives, they considerably underuse other low frequency collocations (densely populated,
preconceived notions) which were, however, strongly linked (Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). Therefore, frequency appears to guide the acquisition process for L2 learners, as they are able to acquire and use high frequency collocations but unable to pick up low frequency ones, whose constituent words may also be infrequent. Likewise, Ellis, Simpson-Vlach, and Maynard (2008) found that for native speakers the important factor that determined the ability to process a formulaic sequence was mutual information (MI), which measures the strength of association between two words (Clear, 1993), whereas for nonnative learners it was primarily its frequency.

2.3.4.2 Appropriate Use

In her research study Oppenheim (2000) found that L2 learners produced a significant percentage of the same word strings during repeated speeches on the same topic. However, these sequences were highly idiosyncratic and did not match native use. Nesselhauf (2003; 2005) found that almost one quarter of verb-noun collocations used by German university students in their essays in the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) were inaccurate and were caused by interference of their first language. Interestingly, the participants used conventional English pairs, but failed to use them in appropriate contexts.

L2 learners’ problematic use of collocation is most probably influenced by the collocational restrictions in their first language, and, so, instruction targeted to these language aspects is considered necessary (Nesselhauf, 2003). Wray (2002) suggests that this discrepancy regarding native and nonnative collocation intuitions is a result of a differential acquisition process. L2 learners in contrast to native speakers focus on individual words rather than on FS during the acquisition process. However, “words do
not go together, having first been apart, but, rather, belong together, and do not necessarily need separating” (Wray, p. 212).

2.3.4.3 Intuitions about Formulaic Sequences

Recent research investigating nonnative speakers’ intuitions of formulaic language has suggested that they are not as developed or as automatized as the intuitions of native speakers. For instance, Siyanova and Schmitt (2008) compared native and nonnative judgements of the frequency of adjective-noun collocations on a Lickert scale and found that nonnatives displayed inaccurate intuitions about relevant frequency of both high-frequency and low-frequency collocations in contrast to natives and were slower in making their judgements. In addition, learners were unable to distinguish between mid- and high-frequency collocations. However, the participants who had spent a year or more in an English-speaking country were able to perceive the difference. This finding stresses the potential advantages of massive exposure to linguistic input in naturalistic language learning contexts.

Phongphio and Schmitt (2006) compared adult Thai learners’ intuitions of knowledge of multi-word verbs with their actual scores on a multiple-choice test, and found that these learners overestimated their ability in this aspect of formulaic language. These studies show that the quality of L2 learner intuitions about formulaic sequences is low and this can shed some light into the question of why nonnative learners do not feel confident to employ these sequences to gain processing advantages in demanding communicative tasks (Foster, 2001; Nesselhauf, 2005), but instead their speech is abundant with pauses and hesitations which make them sound inarticulate (De Cock et al., 1998).
2.3.5 Approaches for the Teaching of Formulaic Sequences

It is, therefore, evident from the above section that L2 learners are faced with acute difficulties in their mastery of formulaic sequences (Moon, 1992; Yorio, 1980) which must be accounted for if language teaching is to be more successful in this respect. Wray (2000) identifies three recent approaches to language teaching that have attempted to resolve the issue of incorporating FS in instruction in a principled way.

First, Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) emphasize the fact that common FS are used to realize interactional functions stressing their facilitating role in conversation. They suggest that the lexical phrase is the most appropriate unit of formulaic language for teaching purposes. Nattinger (1980, p. 341) argues:

> Perhaps we should base our teaching on the assumption that, for a great deal of the time anyway, language production consists of piecing together that ready-made units appropriate for a particular situation and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations. Our teaching therefore would center on these patterns and the ways they can be pieced together, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur.

Nattinger (1988) gives the following taxonomy of lexical phrases that must be acknowledged in language teaching:

1. Polywords: short, fixed phrases usually syntactically irregular such as idioms, and multi-word verbs.
3. Deictic locutions: phrases that organize the flow of conversation (as far as I know, for that matter).
4. Sentence builders: highly variable phrases or sentences with slots (the ...er X, the ...Y; If I X, then I Y).
5. Situational utterances: complete syntactically regular sentences used for particular social interactions.
6. Verbatim texts: Entire texts mostly fixed such as quotations, proverbs, allusions etc.

Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) propose the following guidelines to promote the teaching and acquisition of formulaic sequences (p. 117):

- drills that practice patterns using fixed routines to enhance fluency and confidence
- substitution drills with controlled variation to show that some of the ‘fixed’ routines previously learnt are actually patterns that have open slots
- freer variation that allows learners to analyze the patterns additionally

They, furthermore, assert that second language learners are able to use these formulaic sequences as linguistic material that they will analyze to extract morphological and grammatical rules and acquire the grammar of a language. In the preface to *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching*, they remark: “more recent research puts this formulaic speech at the very centre of language acquisition and sees it as basic to the creative rule-forming processes that follow”. They believe that lexical items and grammatical rules are both legitimate ways of deciding whether sequences are acceptable in the target language (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 22f).

Second, Willis (1990) emphasizes the way certain words feature in word strings and believes that classroom teaching should encourage learners to notice these patterns through the presentation of language data that demonstrate their usage. He believes that “the commonest patterns in English occur again and again with the commonest words in English” (Willis, 1990, p. 38) and, therefore, he proposes that “if we are to provide learners with language experience which offers exposure to the most useful patterns of the language, we might as well begin by researching the most useful words in the
Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences

He embraces word frequency as an important factor in the selection of lexical material for teaching. For example, he illustrates the fact that the word *way*, which is the third most frequent word in English after *time* and *people* (Willis, 1990, p. 28), exemplifies a number of characteristic fixed phrases such as *by way of*, *by the way* (p. 30) and frames such as *the best way to... is to...* and *one way of...-ing ... is by...-ing* (p. 38). Therefore, Willis (1990) emphasizes the semi-fixed and semi-flexible patterns that Pawley and Syder (1983) called lexicalised sentence stems. However, in his approach the introduction of formulaic sequences is secondary and a byproduct of the way frequent words appear in linguistic patterns. Willis also supports the view that “we need to encourage learners to analyze the language they have experienced in such a way as to facilitate development and to inculcate productive approaches to learning” (Willis, 1990, pp. 117-118). The *Lexical Syllabus* (Willis, 1990), therefore, should not be mistaken for a mere list of vocabulary items. It actually “subsumes a structural syllabus, [and] it also indicates how the structures which make up syllabus should be exemplified” (Willis, 1990, p. vi). This syllabus is in agreement with Sinclair and Renouf’s (1988) suggestion that “the main focus of study should be on (a) the commonest word forms in the language; (b) the central patterns of usage; (c) the combinations which they usually form” (p. 148).

2.3.5.1 The Lexical Approach

Third, Boers et al. (2006) comment that Lewis’ (1993) *Lexical Approach* has been most effective in communicating the pedagogical message of drawing learners’ attention to formulaic sequences in language teaching. This section discusses the pedagogical implications of the *Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993) more extensively since its
recommendations have informed the production of the language teaching materials used
(Magic Book) and the teaching methodology followed in this study.

Lewis (1993) believes that lexis is the core aspect of language and that language
actually consists of “grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar” (p. 89). He
recommends placing greater emphasis on the way words combine. He introduces the term
lexical item, a term which does not only refer to individual words, but also to multi-word
strings and, consequently, encompasses formulaic sequences by including lexical strings
such as polywords, collocations, institutionalized sentences, and lexicalised sentence
stems. He states his belief that these multi-word lexical items are usually undervalued and
under-exploited in syllabuses. In his approach, it is “lexical phrases- a particular kind of
lexical item-... [that] provide the basis for a lexically, rather than grammatically driven
syllabus” (Lewis, 1993, p. 100). He proposes that these lexical phrases should be selected
for language teaching based on their ‘archetypicality’ and should be introduced early. His
approach aims to provide:

- “A large vocabulary, even if [low level students] are initially unable to
  grammaticalise it”.
- “Pragmatically useful lexical items, particularly institutionalized utterances”.
- “A balance... between (relatively rare) words carrying considerable meaning,
  and (relatively wide and frequent) patterns with low meaning content” (Lewis,
  1993, pp. 106-107).

Lewis (1993, pp. 193-194) summarizes the methodological principles and
implications of the Lexical Approach:

1. Language teaching materials should expose students to rich, real English input at
   all stages.
2. Teaching should put early emphasis on receptive skills, especially, listening. Through their talking time teachers can offer valuable exposure to extensive, deictic language for receptive purposes.

3. Emphasis on receptive grammar practice and skills. Awareness-raising and exploration techniques are valued more than teacher explanation. Productive grammar skills are expected to develop based on receptive skills.

4. Increased emphasis on communicative competence and fluency as well as confidence rather than accuracy, which is the last element of competence to be acquired.

5. Teacher should react primarily to the content of student language and respond to student mistakes with reformulation and feedback.

6. Teaching should take lexis seriously and increase vocabulary from early on, even with de-contextualized vocabulary learning, to increase communicative ability.

7. Non-linear recording formats such as collocation tables, mind-maps, word-trees etc. should be employed to record the way new language co-occurs with other text.

8. Pedagogical chunking should be a frequent classroom activity to enable learners to develop awareness and to help them identify the constituent parts within the whole.

9. Spoken language should be given prominence over writing. Extensive writing should be delayed as long as possible.

10. Awareness-raising should draw attention to contrast both internal to English and between English and the students’ native language.

In the Lexical Approach, students are consistently invited to notice the lexical chunks that appear repeatedly in the naturally occurring language included in the learning
Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences

materials they are exposed to and this procedure is called ‘chunking’. Lewis (1993) believes that this can be achieved if we “heighten students’ awareness of the bits of which coherent discourse or written text is composed” (p. 121). Awareness-raising and imitation of sequences is believed to result in their acquisition. He, furthermore, proposes a number of classroom activities that are geared towards assisting learners to commit these lexical phrases to memory. For example, he suggests activities such as summarizing a text on the basis of selected word combinations to facilitate the learning of collocations, classifying word combinations across different structural or semantic categories, and reading passages aloud with emphasis on phonological chunking.

Lewis (1993) maintains emphasizing the role of “word grammar (collocation and cognates)” (p. 3) and downplaying the role of sentence grammar. This is because he believes in the generative power of sub-sentential, word patterns (as well as supra-sentential, text patterns) which can allow learners to produce novel language and to develop insights into acceptable sequences. In his published work, Lewis asserts that formulaic sequences can give access to grammar:

It now seems plausible that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes or ‘chunks’, and that these chunks become the raw data by which the learner begins to perceive patterns, morphology, and those other features of language traditionally thought of as ‘grammar’. Within such a model, phrases acquired as wholes are the primary resource by which the syntactic system is mastered (Lewis, 1993, p. 95).
He views grammar “as a receptive skill, involving the perception of similarity and difference” (Lewis, 1993, p. vii). He rejects traditional rule-based approaches to grammar and argues that “grammar will, to some extent at least, be acquired through generalizing and learning the restrictions on the generalization from these sentences” (Lewis, 1993, p. 100).

2.4 The Meeting of Lexis and Grammar

John Sinclair (1991) has convincingly argued that “the language looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once” (p. 100). Indeed, language corpora have revolutionized the way language is studied during the past thirty years. The huge language databases that computers can nowadays store and manipulate using appropriate software have allowed linguists and materials developers to draw conclusions based on authentic language use rather than on intuition both about written and spoken language. For example, the British National Corpus and The Bank of English include hundreds of millions of words. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) also contains 425+ million tokens with a substantial spoken component. Corpus analysis has enabled us to study and analyze aspects of phraseology, the tendency of words to occur in preferred sequences, and to realize that “by far the majority of text is made up of the occurrence of common words in common patterns” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 108), even though the importance of multiword expressions for language use had been stressed previously as well (Palmer, 1925). The patterns observed in corpus analysis reveal that “a substantial proportion of the language description is of this mixed nature” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 104) and offer the insight that lexis and syntax are mutually dependent and inseparable since “lexical and syntactic choices correlate” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 104). The pedagogical approaches for the teaching of formulaic language discussed in the previous section of this paper also reflect
the view that lexis and grammar can no longer be viewed as separate entities in the field of applied linguistics and that this distinction upon which language teaching has traditionally been founded is no longer valid. Indeed, Lewis (1993) rejects the grammar/vocabulary dichotomy and emphasizes word grammar. He argues that “grammar is not logically distinct from ‘vocabulary’” (p. 137) since individual words, both weak, delexicalised ones (take) and the ones carrying powerful lexical content (submarine), have their own grammar.

Schmitt (2010) sees formulaic sequences with open slots as strikingly exemplifying this interrelationship between lexis and grammar. These sequences combine some words that are fixed, but also allow for a number of slots to be filled by various words or phrases that conform to certain semantic restrictions. For example, he mentions the sequence _thinks nothing of___ in which the first slot can be completed with items satisfying the semantic criterion of “animate object” and the second with some “activity which is surprising, unexpected or unusual” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 133). These sequences are considered very useful because their variability allows their use in a range of different contexts (Schmitt, 2010). Hunston and Francis (2000) propose a description and acquisition of language in terms of such patterns. Pattern-based models of language acquisition (Hunston & Francis, 2000; Tomasello, 2003) suggest that humans learn languages through their ability to extract such patterns from input. This approach implies that we learn what is acceptable in a language implicitly by repeatedly recognizing patterns such as acceptable letter sequences and sequences of morphemes which can combine to form words, developing intuitions of acceptable collocation pairs, and of longer formulaic sequences that include patterns such as the ones with open slots. These approaches echo Sinclair’s observation that “most everyday words do not have an independent meaning, or meanings, but are components of a rich repertoire of multi-word
patterns that make up text” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 108). These models of language acquisition, thus, assign formulaic sequences a unique status for successful language acquisition.

2.5 Young Learners

Teaching children is sometimes mistakenly viewed as less intellectually demanding compared to teaching older learners, owing to the less sophisticated knowledge and limited familiarity that children have with the world (Cameron, 2001). In fact, teachers of young learners need to develop insights into the ways children think and learn as well as develop skills in motivating and managing children, and in using appropriate tasks and methodology. In this section an overview of theories relevant to children’s language learning will be given with the aim of highlighting the distinctive characteristics of teaching young learners in the Greek primary education context.

2.5.1 Theories Relevant to Children’s Language Learning

Piaget, one of the most important theorists in developmental psychology, viewed the child as actively constructing knowledge through interacting with the environment. He viewed learning as a process that occurs when a child takes action to solve a problem presented by the environment while he or she works with objects and ideas. According to Piaget (1952), a child’s cognition gradually evolves through several developmental stages. At each stage, the child is capable of a specific type of thinking. Importantly, abstract, logical thinking becomes available roughly from the age of eleven or more. Children’s thinking is, furthermore, characterized by egocentricity, in that they do not understand the perspectives of others (Piaget, 1967; 1971). However, the Piagetian idea of a child’s limited thinking capacity before he or she has reached a particular stage has
been criticized. Margaret Donaldson (1978) managed to challenge these claims, showing in the experiments she devised with her colleagues that when appropriate language, tasks and objects are used, very young children are capable for more advanced thinking than Piaget believed them to be. Moreover, children have intentions and purposes in their actions and they also expect other people’s actions to have intentions and purposes (Donaldson).

These ideas contain some powerful ways of conceptualizing language learning for young learners such as the ones in the context of the present study. Firstly, the young child can be thought of as searching for meaning and intention in interaction relying on his or her partial world knowledge and exploiting the environment of the classroom and the activities for learning opportunities. If the language used, the objects and the tasks are appropriate and child-friendly, then children should be able to interact with them and make sense of the new language (Cameron, 2001). In addition, young children do not profit from formal grammar teaching or use of metalanguage due to their lack of abstract thinking and the teacher needs to find alternative ways of drawing attention to aspects of the foreign language that carry meaning.

On the other hand, Vygotsky (1962), in contrast with Piaget, prioritized the social context in which learning takes place and stressed the importance of communication and social interaction for children’s development. He developed the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and suggested that children are able to do and understand much more when they are helped by adults and that intelligence should be measured by what a child can do with skilled help rather than alone. For Vygotsky, language is also a very important social tool for children’s learning that contributes to cognitive development. Children use words as symbols and use private speech to organize themselves while playing or doing some kind of task. Gradually, the child relies less and
less on the help of others and becomes more independent. Likewise, talking aloud becomes inner thought through the process of internalization.

Bruner (1983; 1990) capitalized on Vygotsky’s idea that adults mediate the world for children through the use of language and help them in problem-solving. His notion of scaffolding describes the adult talk that guides the child in carrying out an activity. This talk is fine-tuned to serve the needs of the child and becomes adjusted as these needs change. Bruner’s notion of formats and routines is also useful for language teaching. They refer to characteristics of events that allow for scaffolding to take place and that incorporate both familiar and novel aspects offering space for growth.

The importance of words for early language learning, the communicative and meaningful use of language by the teacher and the pupils before it can become internalized as part of the child’s knowledge, the usefulness of routines and scaffolding for learning and the provision of experiences within the students’ ZPD or potential for learning stem from the work of these theorists as important principles for teaching young learners.

### 2.5.2 Young Learners’ Characteristics

This study focuses on the teaching of early learners of English and more specifically pupils of the third grade of primary school around eight years of age. An analysis of the distinctive features of these young learners is, therefore, essential. These learners have been characterized as being mainly kinesthetic learners (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990) who need physical action in the classroom to support their learning. They possess a vivid imagination and are not fully capable of distinguishing between what is real and what is imaginary (Scott & Ytreberg). Scott and Ytreberg also note that early learners are focused on the immediate uses of language and can apply it more readily than they can
understand its rules; they have a limited attention and concentration span; they are enthusiastic and positively predisposed towards learning; they value approval and praise; they enjoy learning in a playful environment; they do not usually admit lack of understanding; they often prefer working and playing alone since they are still quite egocentric.

As a result, Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, role plays, games and action songs seem to cater well for these needs offering meaningful interaction through movement and physical action. Rhymes, songs, and gamelike activities can offer a playful element that facilitates learning. Picture story books can fuel their imagination and offer meaningful and familiar contexts for language use as well as interesting topics. Realia and the use of sensory and visual aids should, moreover, feature prominently in young children’s language teaching. Teachers need to vary the activities and materials to counteract children’s short attention spans and display a lively and enthusiastic performance. Meaning should be made explicit using gestures, voice modification, and bodily movements. Meaningful repetition and recycling are deemed necessary for effective learning (Brown, 1994). Philips (1993) stresses that the younger the pupils are, the more holistic learners they will be. The teacher needs, thus, to foster a whole language approach focusing on meaning rather than on analysis of linguistic aspects. Finally, affective factors are crucial in young learners’ classrooms as young learners need a supportive, non-threatening learning environment (Brown). The teacher should manifest a warm and patient attitude to build self-esteem, trust, and security.

These young learners are expected to continue developing their first language throughout the first school years and will bring differential linguistic abilities and skills in the foreign language classroom (Cameron, 2001). This means that different children will learn different things from the same lesson owing to their individual differences and
ZPDs. Moreover, foreign language learning will essentially rely more heavily on oral language since children at this age may not have fully mastered literacy skills in their first language yet. Teachers need to be careful in their provision of activities to make sure that literacy demands are minimal (Cameron, 2003). The teaching of literacy skills needs to be supported by oral language, such as rhymes and stories (Cameron, 2003). This reliance on oral language requires that the teacher be fluent in the foreign language to conduct lessons predominantly in the oral mode, be able to use a wide range of vocabulary to exploit learning opportunities that arise in the classroom, and have excellent pronunciation skills which will be accurately imitated by young learners (Cameron, 2003).

Taking into consideration the characteristics of early language learners and having consulted experts in the language teaching field, Endelebos, Johnstroke, and Kubanek (2006, pp. 155-156) conclude on several principles which can be used as maxims for action in good early language teaching practice:

- promote children’s enjoyment to learn an additional language
- promote basic communication skills
- maintain and improve the initial motivation children exhibit in learning
- offer language activities that are age- and stage- appropriate for learners
- provide meaningful contexts and relevant topics
- secure comprehension is available before production
- provide holistic language learning
- offer a primarily visual and multi sensory approach to learning
- give plentiful pronunciation training
- offer training in the relationships between the sounds and writing systems of the language being learnt
2.6 The Early EFL Learning Context in Greece

Acknowledging the value of multilingualism in the European Union, the European Commission has proposed the learning of at least two foreign languages from a very young age (Commission, 2005). Early language learning is seen as promoting intercultural understanding and occupational mobility offering advantages for European citizens (Edelenbos et al., 2006). In most European countries teaching a first foreign language in primary school begins between ages six and nine (Eurydice, 2012) and there is a growing tendency in Europe and worldwide to lower the age when children start learning a foreign or second language at school (Cameron, 2003) even in pre-primary settings (Eurydice). Following parents’ growing demands to provide their children with the advantages of early language learning, there has been an increasing development in private tuition, coursebook publications and formal examinations for young learners lately. For example, Cameron mentions that approximately 150,000 children have sat the UCLES Tests for Young Learners in the year 2000.

In Greece the English language is the most prestigious foreign language due to its status as a lingua franca facilitating contact among nonnative speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds all over the world for commercial, recreational, political and other purposes. Furthermore, proficiency in English is considered a vital qualification for career advancement and an essential academic skill in Greece. In addition, the use of the internet and popular culture presupposes knowledge of English. Although English has been taught in secondary education in Greece since 1945, it was not until 1987 that it was introduced in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of primary school, first as a pilot programme and later, in 1992, as a compulsory subject. The teaching of English expanded in the third grade of primary schools in 2003 and in 2010 the Ministry of Education introduced a reformed curriculum called ‘Unified Reformed Educational Programme’ (Greek acronym
EAEP) to 800 selected state schools, which offered new subjects such as drama and computer education and expanded the teaching of English to the first and second grade of primary school under the project ‘English for Young Learners’ (EYL), which is known through its Greek acronym PEAP. What is more, the EYL project introduced a new textbook for the teaching of English in the third grade called *Magic Book* (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2011). In most state schools students were taught with the aid of *Magic Book 1*, addressed to beginner students, and received three English lessons (each 45 minutes long) per week while in the reformed curriculum schools (EAEP) third-graders were taught with *Magic Book 2*, addressed to students who had already been taught English in the first two grades of primary school and received four 45-minute lessons per week. Since the 2016-2017 school year the early childhood EFL framework has expanded its implementation in all Greek state schools. All primary school students now begin learning English in their first year of school and third-graders will, consequently, be exclusively taught with *Magic Book 2* from the next school year onwards. However, the amount of tuition has been reduced again to three lessons weekly for all pupils attending the third grade of primary school.

The significance and growing interest for foreign language learning in the Greek educational context is, furthermore, evidenced by the role of private tuition in Greece. A big percentage of young pupils attend private English language schools in the afternoon, such that this additional tuition is considered the norm rather than the exception in Greece. Alternatively, a number of students receive additional private tuition at home where they are taught on a one-to-one basis. These courses are typically directed towards preparing students to sit for various exams certifying language proficiency.
2.6.1 Implementation of the EYL Project

The Greek early EFL framework is, therefore, a ‘low input level’ context offering a limited number of teaching hours per week and very limited access to the foreign language outside the classroom (Pinter, 2011). However, the English teachers in the Greek setting are specialized language teachers holding a university degree in English language and literature contrary to what happens in many instructional contexts abroad where the general teacher of the class also teaches the foreign language in the primary school (Eurydice, 2012). The implementation of the programme combined both top-down and bottom-up processes, meaning that both academics and field experts and practicing language teachers were involved in the realization of the programme. The Research Centre for Language Teaching, Testing, and Assessment (RCeL) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens collaborated in formulating the programme with language teachers through research into their profiles, needs, and perceptions (Dendrinos, 2013).

More specifically, for the third grade of primary school, Marina Mattheoudakis and Thomai Alexiou, members of staff of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, are Head Co-Authors of the teaching and learning material for both Magic Book 1 and Magic Book 2. They are academically responsible for the design and production of the material and they have guided the writing team in Thessaloniki. The teaching materials include:

(i) Coursebooks Magic Book 1 (MB1) and Magic Book 2 (MB2)
(ii) Activity books Magic Book 1 and Magic Book 2
(iii) A Teacher’s book for each coursebook
(iv) 2 CDs with the sound files of the texts and activities

There are also resource materials accessible online with karaoke, animated videos, and
extra activities, such as memory games and puzzles, as well as an interactive flip-book. These materials are provided with the aim of complementing and differentiating instruction. *Magic Book 1* includes eight units and each unit consists of three lessons. Each unit introduces a story which is based on familiar fairytales (e.g. Pinocchio) and fables (e.g. Aesop’s fable ‘The story of Bella the Cat’) and includes a different moral (for example, ‘lying is wrong’ and ‘the power of the weak’).

### 2.6.2 Approach and Methodology of Magic Book

The innovative nature of the *Magic Book* (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2011) materials is believed to rest on their design being guided by insights offered by research evidence in second language acquisition. The authors have made a principled selection of vocabulary and the materials are informed by Communicative Language Learning, the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993), the Eclectic Approach (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), and a combination of Phonics with Whole Language Approach for the teaching of literacy. Moreover, the activities they feature are believed to promote young learners’ cognitive skills (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015).

To begin with, the materials of the *Magic Book* series have been designed to conform to the principles of the *Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993) and, therefore, acknowledge the importance of lexical phrases or chunks and introduce more instances of phrases, in contrast to more traditional materials which emphasize individual words. *Magic Book* places emphasis on formulaic language and introduces a large number of lexical phrases like *let's see, you’re back home, sure we can*, and collocations such as *brush your teeth, sweep the floor, recycle paper, plant a tree* etc. in order to promote fluency and motivation. In addition, the language occurring in *Magic Book* materials includes institutionalized expressions which are contextualized in the story episodes and
situations such as short, hardly grammaticalised utterances (Oh, no!, Come on!, Super!), sentence heads or frames that typically include the first words of utterances and serve a pragmatic function (Can you...?; Let me tell you a story about...), and full sentences with pragmatic meaning (I’m (so) sorry!) (Lewis). The materials offer a linguistically rich experience and reflect real language use in agreement with the recommendations of the Lexical Approach; language input is not excessively simplified so as to exemplify only the most basic grammatical structures and vocabulary is not unnecessarily limited. Learners are encouraged to notice and commit these formulaic sequences to memory through a variety of playful activities which raise awareness and recycle these phrases within the same unit, but also in consecutive units or after several units (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015).

What is more, Magic Book is a course book operating on a lexical syllabus. It does not teach grammar explicitly, but the grammatical forms are presented implicitly through the large amount of lexical phrases used in the story episodes included in the books (e.g. this is our classroom, plant a tree etc.). These structures are not presented separately but learners are encouraged to understand their meaning and incidentally acquire them as they use the phrases in their speech (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015). Since the young learners these books target have not yet developed their analytic cognitive skills, this implicit approach is believed to suit them best (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015) due to the fact that this type of learning cannot be influenced by explicit metalinguistic explanation (Schmitt, 2010). At a later stage, these learners can profit from their knowledge of formulaic language to develop a rule-based competence (Ellis, 2005) as argued by pattern-based models of language acquisition discussed in previous sections of
this paper (Hunston & Francis, 2000; Tomasello, 2003). Yet, the rules that learners may be able to articulate will be the result rather than the source of the learning of patterns (Schmitt).

Furthermore, the materials place great emphasis on lexis and present a great number of word types (637 in MB1) (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015) to offer a rich lexical experience. Children of this age have been reported to be able to acquire around 500 words per year (Cameron, 2001) and *Magic Book* 1 actually exceeds this amount of vocabulary. The materials are characterized by a principled selection of vocabulary, which involved analyzing the needs of the young learners which they address. The selection of lexis is, thus, based on criteria such as frequency of vocabulary, age of learners, and appropriate themes (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015). More than sixty per cent of all the word types included in MB1 (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015) belong to the 2,000 most frequent words in English (Nation, 2004) and these words are also presented in their inflected or derived forms (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015) facilitating acquisition, retention (Bauer & Nation, 1993) and retrieval (Schmitt, 2000). In addition, the themes of the books are selected to reflect the interests and everyday activities of young learners. Finally, concrete lexical items are preferred over abstract ones as they are considered more appropriate and easier to acquire for younger learners. Finally, the authors of *Magic Book* place emphasis on the recycling of vocabulary items in order to promote depth of vocabulary knowledge by using words and their different forms in a number of different contexts rather than promoting a larger vocabulary size. The fact that *Magic Book* operates on a lexical syllabus dictates this principle in syllabus design:

Almost paradoxically, the lexical syllabus does not encourage the piecemeal acquisition of a large vocabulary, especially initially. Instead, it concentrates on making full use of the words that the learner already has, at any particular stage. It
teaches that there is far more general utility in the recombination of known elements rather than in the addition of less easily usable items (Sinclair and Renouf, 1988, p. 155).

The emphasis on vocabulary depth is, thus, supported by a high recycling rate in the materials as evidenced by a low type-token ratio (11% for MB1) indicating low lexical variation and high recycling rate (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015).

In order to cater for the needs of young learners Magic Book adopts an Eclectic Approach (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) and includes elements from various methods and approaches deemed relevant to their learning characteristics and needs. It includes activities from Total Physical Response, Task-Based Learning, and Content-Based Instruction. It adopts storytelling as a framework for the presentation of language, since these young learners are familiar with the conventions of the narrative genre (Ellis & Brewster, 2002) and familiar fairytales are believed to boost motivation, cultivate imagination (Ellis & Brewster, 2002), and facilitate acquisition through increased comprehension (Rixon, 1991).

### 2.6.3 Approaches in Current EFL Teaching Materials

Tomlinson (2012) notes that one negative trend in current materials is the return to the centrality of grammar, which goes against recent findings in SLA research. Since all materials reflect a view of language and a theory of language learning, authors and publishers wish to claim that their materials are based on the latest trends in teaching methodology (Richards, 2005). However, according to Tomlinson, the methodological innovations course books claim to be based on might be very different from what they are actually based on. In fact, the vast majority of coursebooks that are nowadays used in Greek private language schools value explicit grammar teaching and operate on a strong
grammatical syllabus that features discrete item listing that progresses in a linear fashion, whereas language teachers conceptualize grammar teaching as explicit presentation of rules. Yet, as early as 1979, Widdowson observes “dividing language into discrete units of whatever type misrepresents the nature of language as communication” (Widdowson, 1979, as cited in Nunan, 1988, p. 34) while the applied linguistics literature abounds in observations that what is taught is not necessarily what is learned. Materials development is a commercial undertaking and publishers are very reluctant to include features which they think the audience they target will not receive enthusiastically (Tomlinson). Most learners and teachers, nowadays, prefer the inclusion of familiar grammatical phenomena in textbooks and would view materials organized around a lexical syllabus as neglecting grammar teaching. In fact, grammar “remains central to the teaching of languages in schools, and correspondingly remains a powerful influence on students’ expectations for the whole of their learning careers” (Lewis, 1993, p. 133). This is why the language content of most teaching materials rarely surprises language teachers: it has obviously been conveniently adjusted to conform to stakeholders’ expectations (Lewis, 1993).

On the other hand, the vast majority of language teachers in Greek private language schools teach grammar and vocabulary as separate entities. Yet, the experience of using corpora has challenged these deeply rooted assumptions concerning syllabus design. The key observation arising from corpus analysis is the inextricable link between meaning and pattern, lexis and grammar. Sinclair (1991, p. 7) claims that “there is ultimately no distinction between form and meaning”. According to this view of language, there is little point in presenting learners with randomly lexicalized grammatical structures in a discrete and linear fashion. If lexis and the phrase are adopted instead as the main organizing principle for syllabus design, the main points of grammar will be implicitly presented through the commonest patterns in which words are used
(Willis, 1990) since “words determine grammar” (Lewis, 1993, p. 128). Moreover, selection of lexical items in current materials is often informed by author intuition rather than by principles stemming from SLA research findings, such as frequency or the importance of formulaic language for fluent and natural communication.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology adopted in the present study. It presents and discusses the young L2 pupils who participated in the experiment, the instructional methods that were implemented at the state primary and the private language school, the measures tested, and the collection and analysis of the data. It, finally, suggests certain limitations of the method adopted in the study.

3.1 Rationale

As has been extensively discussed in the literature review section of this paper, the use of formulaic language is intrinsically linked to fluent, communicative, and natural language use. Its ubiquity in language and the significant advantages it is believed to confer to native speakers and language learners have motivated a number of scholars to propose language teaching approaches that emphasize formulaic sequences and their noticing in discourse. Lewis’ (1993) Lexical Approach is regarded as one of the most comprehensive and successful approaches and methods in communicating this message. In the Greek educational context the authors of Magic Book (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015), a coursebook for the young pupils of the third grade of state primary school, have incorporated these insights into their materials. The present study aims to evaluate the results of this instructional approach for these young pupils. More specifically, mastery of formulaic sequences is believed to result in three major advantages for L2 learners. First, since a number of formulaic sequences reflect the ‘idiom principle’ (Sinclair, 1991), they are syntactically irregular and semantically non-compositional. They are not predictable and cannot be composed of their lexical components or the grammar rules of the
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language. Their use can, therefore, contribute to the perception of learners’ spoken output as being more native-like and natural. Second, since formulaic sequences are stored and retrieved from memory as prefabricated wholes or ‘chunks’, they are believed to offer processing advantages in real-time speaking tasks and to, consequently, enhance fluency (Pawley & Syder, 1983). Third, formulaic sequences can help learners reach a degree of linguistic accuracy if they are acquired correctly because they usually exhibit a linguistic competence that is above the learners’ current level of competence in creative production. The learner can use them as ‘islands of reliability’ (Dechert, 1980) or ‘zones of safety’ (Boers et al., 2006) and consequently limit the risk of being inaccurate to the spaces in between these chunks in his or her output.

However, in the Greek EFL context a considerable number of young learners also attend English classes in private language schools called ‘frontistiria’. In these private schools pupils typically receive a more traditional instructional approach which preserves the dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary, does not emphasize formulaic language but teaches discrete words instead, and in which grammar is taught explicitly as a rule-based competence and given prominence over the teaching of lexis. The instructional approach followed in EFL instruction in the Greek state primary school contrasts sharply with the approach usually followed in private language schools and, thus, any differences found in the perceived linguistic proficiency of L2 learners who receive instruction based on these two different approaches as well as in their acquisition of formulaic sequences would be extremely interesting. Determining the effect of combining a lexical approach with a traditional grammar-based one is also crucial because this is the case for a great number of young learners in the Greek EFL context. Moreover, even though language teaching materials for both young and adult learners show a trend towards increased lexicalisation over the past decades (Granger, 2011), implementing a lexical approach is
considered to present a challenge to language teachers As Lewis (1993) comments “the changes in content imply quite radical changes of method” and “much of the proposed new content will be difficult to use effectively unless... teachers’ attitudes develop so that syllabus and method are in harmony” (Lewis, p. 1). Yet, language teachers may prove unwilling or unprepared to alter their attitudes and adapt their teaching methodology so that it is consistent with the approach reflected in their new teaching materials. This might be the case for English language teachers using the Magic Book materials in the state primary school. Nonetheless, the implications of analysing language in an unnatural and unhelpful way during language learning are said to be detrimental for learners:

if students break up the language to which they are exposed in unhelpful ways, and then store ‘the wrong bits’ the advantage of storing chunks will be lost and tremendous processing demands will be made upon them as they attempt to re-create from scratch (Lewis, p. 121).

Taking the above assumptions into consideration, the following hypotheses are formed:

1. An instructional method that exclusively emphasizes noticing of formulaic sequences can be more successful in helping L2 learners acquire formulaic sequences than if this method is combined with traditional teaching.

2. The use of formulaic sequences can help learners come across as generally proficient L2 speakers.

3. An instructional method that exclusively emphasizes noticing of formulaic sequences can help L2 learners use these phrases in their spoken production and therefore contribute to their perceived linguistic proficiency to a greater extent than if this method is combined with traditional teaching.
More specifically, with reference to the first hypothesis it is hypothesized that the exclusive application of an instructional method promoting formulaic sequences can (a) help learners recognize the form of these sequences and (b) help learners recall the form of these sequences. In addition, with reference to the second hypothesis it is hypothesized that (a) mastery of formulaic sequences can help learners come across as fluent L2 speakers (since the use of ready-made formulaic sequences saves processing time in production and results in fewer hesitations (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Skehan, 1998)); (b) mastery of formulaic sequences can help learners come across as having acquired a good range of expression in the L2 (since formulaic sequences characterize natural, idiomatic speech (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Sinclair, 1991)); and (c) mastery of formulaic sequences can help learners come across as being accurate L2 speakers (since formulaic sequences constitute zones of safety for L2 learners (Bolander, 1989; Dechert, 1980; Pawley & Syder, 1983)).

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The present study aims to test the effectiveness of the Magic Book 1 teaching materials which are informed by principles of the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) and, therefore, emphasize lexis, formulaic sequences and ‘phrase-noticing’ while teaching grammar only implicitly. In addition, the study aims to investigate whether the use of formulaic sequences can help learners to come across as generally proficient L2 speakers. It, furthermore, aims to shed light on the effect of receiving additional instruction based on a more traditional grammar-based approach. This more traditional approach for language teaching followed in most private English language schools in Greece preserves the dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary, does not emphasize formulaic language but teaches discrete words instead, teaches grammar explicitly as a rule-based
competence, and gives grammar a dominant role compared to the teaching of lexis. More specifically, the study aims to research whether there is a difference in the acquisition and use of formulaic sequences between young L2 learners who receive traditional instruction in private language schools and those who are only taught with lexically informed materials. It, furthermore, aims to determine whether there is a difference in the L2 oral proficiency learners are perceived as having when narrating a story between young L2 learners who receive traditional instruction in private language schools and those who are only taught with lexically informed materials.

Hence, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is an instructional approach that emphasizes chunk-noticing more successful in making L2 learners recognize the form of formulaic sequences than if it is combined with a traditional approach?

2. Is an instructional approach that emphasizes chunk-noticing more successful in making L2 learners recall the form of formulaic sequences than if it is combined with a traditional approach?

3. Can the use of formulaic sequences help learners come across as proficient L2 speakers?

4. Can the use of formulaic sequences help learners come across as fluent L2 speakers?

5. Can the use of formulaic sequences help L2 learners come across as having a good range of expression?

6. Can the use of formulaic sequences help learners come across as accurate L2 speakers?
7. Is an instructional approach that emphasizes chunk-noticing more successful in helping learners come across as proficient L2 speakers (more fluent, more accurate, and with a better range of expression) than if it is combined with a traditional approach?

Therefore, the independent variable in this study is the amount and type of instruction that the young L2 learners receive (lexical approach or lexical approach coupled with traditional instruction) and the dependent variables measured in the study are knowledge of FS, use of FS in L2 oral narratives and L2 learners’ perceived oral proficiency. More specifically, knowledge of FS will be measured both with the recognition of the form of formulaic sequences and the recall of the form of formulaic sequences (including collocations), while perceived oral proficiency will be measured in terms of its components, i.e. perceived oral fluency, perceived range of expression, and perceived accuracy.

3.3 Participants

The participants were 14 young pupils who attended the third grade (eight to nine years old) of a state primary school in the prefecture of Xanthi, in Northeastern Greece. At the beginning of the school year, the pupils completed a questionnaire that contained questions regarding their previous EFL instructional experience and any additional EFL instruction the pupils received apart from instruction at school. Later in the school year, the questionnaire was completed once more by pupils to determine whether their answers were still valid. The results of the survey showed that seven pupils were taught English only at the state primary school, while the other seven attended extra afternoon EFL classes in a private language school. The pupils were, consequently, assigned to two groups, namely, the group that was only instructed at school with Magic Book 1 materials
and a methodology that emphasized noticing of lexical phrases and formulaic language and treated grammar teaching only implicitly (Experimental Group, N=7), and the group that received additional but more traditional tuition in English in a private language school (Control Group, N=7). Nine pupils were female and five were male, but each group consisted of both boys and girls. The students were all rank beginners in terms of their proficiency in English with no previous exposure to the target language, since all of them were being taught English for the first time, both at school and at the private language centre which they attended. Thus, it can be assumed that the two groups’ oral proficiency and vocabulary knowledge in English was at the same level before instruction began (Schmitt, 2010).

3.4 Instruction

Both groups were exposed to the same materials, namely *Magic Book 1* at school. Both groups were taught by the same teacher and received the same amount of class instruction (51 45-minute sessions) at school throughout a period from November to April. In the first six weeks of the school year, which are not counted as proper instruction in this study, the students were taught the English alphabet and became familiar with the graphophonemic conventions of the English language. The input during this initial stage of the teaching of phonics did not focus on lexical phrases. The control group attended extra English classes during the afternoons of the same period in a private English school (41 hours), which means that they received nearly double the amount of EFL instruction that the other group did. The materials they used were *Olly the Owl Junior A* by Hillside Press (Brumma, 2013).

A recording of the syllabus of the language materials for both instructional contexts used in this study reveals that their syllabi share much of the vocabulary and
grammatical structures content, although they view and treat them differently. For example, the vocabulary taught in both courses includes a great percentage of identical lexical items such as the ones related to colours, family terms, foods and drinks, furniture, rooms in the house, numbers, clothes, school items, and animals. Likewise, they share most of the grammatical patterns such as the verb *to be* and *have got*, the present continuous, plurals, imperatives, the verb *can*, demonstrative pronouns (*this is/these are* and *that is/those are*), the present simple. Nevertheless, *Magic Book 1* features richer and more complex language input compared to *Olly the Owl Junior A*. The listening and reading texts are longer and more authentic and more vocabulary and grammar patterns are included in MB 1 than in *Olly the Owl*. MB1 includes a great number of multi-word strings such as lexical phrases, collocations and institutionalized expressions in addition to more individual words. It, also, includes more patterns, which are rarely included in materials addressed to beginner learners such as *I’ll...* and comparative adjectives. The materials used in the private language school (*Olly the Owl Junior A*) are designed to teach young pupils at the pre-A1 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level, whereas almost 62 percent of the lexical items in MB1 belong to the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP) A1-A2 CEFR levels. EVP offers reliable information about which words – and which meaning of those words and phrases – are known and used by learners at each level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). At A1 CEFR proficiency level the learner can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of concrete needs. At A2 CEFR level the learner can communicate in simple and routine tasks about familiar topics and routine matters.
3.4.1 Instruction at School

In both groups instruction at the state primary school directed learners’ attention to formulaic sequences. The way words occur with co-text (collocations, phrases, institutionalized expressions) was emphasized more than individual words and pupils were invited to appreciate the syntagmatic nature of vocabulary. Care was taken that lexical phrases were not broken into their parts but they were taught as single lexical items in order to facilitate their storage and retrieval holistically as chunks and to enhance their memorization (Porto, 1998) in line with research findings from psycholinguistic experiments (Ellis et al., 2008; Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). This was also achieved by maintaining the natural rhythm and intonation in English. Formulaic sequences were, moreover, not translated in the native language but their meaning was to be inferred by their contexts of use, co-text, and the pictorial material accompanying them so that learners were able to offer equivalent expressions in their first language. Most of the activities focusing on formulaic sequences encouraged awareness-raising and the cultivation of receptive skills, especially listening (listen and decide who said this in the story, listen and point to/choose the correct picture, listen and mime, listen and match words that go together, read and circle the phrases etc.). Activities, also, included reading passages aloud with emphasis on phonological chunking, categorizing word combinations based on semantic criteria, and recording words with their typical co-text in notebooks and activity books.

Likewise, grammar was approached as a receptive skill and learners were encouraged to observe language data for patterns, similarities and differences before or as well as being asked to produce it. Thus, the Observe-Hypothesize-Experiment cycle was adopted in the place of the rejected Present-Practice-Produce paradigm. The sentence was not always employed as the basis of language but learners’ attention was also drawn to
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phrases and texts as units of language. Although the four skills were integrated in the course, considerable attention was given to listening activities (audio material and the teacher) and to a lesser extent reading and writing activities in line with the suggestions of the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993). Pupils were, moreover, invited to use the sequences productively while acting out the stories in the book or in role plays but their spoken contributions were voluntary and learners were not pressured or required to speak if they did not feel confident. The course material covered themes appropriate for young learners such as family, food, home, animals, and the text genres were familiar fairytales and fables (Pinocchio, Aesop’s fables) or other stories.

3.4.2 Instruction at Private Language School

On the other hand, the private instruction group additionally received English lessons that analyzed language differently. An interview with the English teacher who taught the participants of the private instruction group in the private language school revealed the nature of language instruction that was given. The traditional distinction between grammar and vocabulary, to which the teacher was accustomed, was maintained. Vocabulary and grammar were conceived of and taught separately, the teaching of vocabulary always preceding the teaching of grammar. The teacher mentions making an effort to teach these two aspects at separate lessons whenever this was possible. Vocabulary centered on individual words rather than phrases and was practiced with the use of flashcards and vocabulary exercises, such as filling in the missing letters or putting jumbled letters in the right order. The teacher reports that the materials included only a very small number of short, simple phrases (That’s great! How fun!), which featured only in the second half of the book. In the private instruction group, the language in the teaching materials was used to exemplify grammar patterns and draw pupils’ attention to
vocabulary at a paradigmatic level, while vocabulary appeared to be neglected in favour of grammar teaching. For example, words were studied as synonyms and antonyms in some vocabulary exercises. Two adapted stories and a fable are also included in the materials (The gingerbread man; The shepherd with the wolf; Hercules and the golden apples). These are intended to revise content in a pleasurable way but the language included is considerably simplified and does not resemble the rich, authentic language that figures in real children’s stories.

For the teaching of grammar the Presentation-Practice-Production model was used, but the teacher reports that free production was actually omitted more often than not because of lack of sufficient time. Grammar was taught explicitly with the use of metalinguistic terminology and explanation and practiced in drills and exercises focusing on the sentence as the optimal linguistic unit. The written exercises used for controlled grammar practice were based on decontextualized sentences and did not reflect actual language use, but were ‘randomly lexicalised’, meaning that the vocabulary used to exemplify and practise the structure was not the vocabulary typically used with that structure (Stranks, 2013). The grammar exercises typically involved manipulation of a sentence; for example, answering a question, negating an affirmative sentence or putting words in the right order.

In conclusion, the two types of instruction that the control group received were essentially divergent in terms of the treatment of both grammar and vocabulary in materials as well as in the learning and teaching activities used, and in terms of the methodology followed by their language teachers.
3.5 Instruments and Measures

In his book *Researching Vocabulary*, Norbert Schmitt (2010) remarks that one of the lexical issues for which we have little understanding is the relationship between receptive and productive mastery of vocabulary. Although it is generally accepted that vocabulary develops moving from receptive mastery to productive mastery, the details of this movement are still unclear. Schmitt calls for research studies that measure both receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary, while Webb (2005) stresses the importance of using multiple measures of lexical knowledge for giving an accurate picture of the degree and type of learning that has occurred. For this reason, the present study includes language measures that test both recognition and recall of formulaic sequences as well as use of formulaic sequences.

In order to clarify which specific aspects of receptive and productive mastery are assessed in this study and to make the measuring of receptive and productive mastery more comparable across studies, Laufer and Goldstein’s (2004) categorization of vocabulary knowledge was drawn upon. Participants were asked to both supply the L2 lexical item form (active recall) and select the L2 lexical item form (active recognition) for meanings that were given through pictures. Thus, two of the four form-meaning possible types of form-meaning knowledge were measured. Form recognition (active recognition) is viewed as being useful in measuring the initial stages of lexical acquisition (Schmitt, 2010). According to Schmitt form recall (active recall) is the first step in productive mastery and a necessary component of skills-based productive knowledge. Learners will, nevertheless, need more time to be able to confidently and appropriately use the lexical items they can recall in spoken and written contexts (Schmitt). The present study also investigates young participants’ use of formulaic sequences in spoken narratives using visual prompts.
3.5.1 Formulaic Sequence Knowledge Measures

The form-meaning link of the lexical items was tested with the use of pictures acting as prompts. Since the participants in this study are young beginner students, this core aspect of lexical knowledge was considered appropriate for their stage in acquisition. However, because the teaching materials also emphasized the teaching of collocations, measuring this knowledge also made sense for these participants. The prompts used to elicit the recall and recognition of formulaic sequences in this study were pictures taken from the story episodes of the MB1 materials. These visual prompts allowed learners to infer the meaning of the lexical items tested and offered the additional advantage of contextualizing the lexical items in the context of the coursebook’s stories. Translations were not used for testing since they did not form part of the instructional procedures. In order to control for the effect of word class in the testing of collocation, the same number of adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations were included in the test.

Schmitt (2010) observes that a principled sampling of formulaic sequences for research purposes is extremely difficult owing to the variability of the category and to the lack of a comprehensive list of items. The scarcity of individual multi-word sequences in discourse questions the fact that they can function as representatives for the acquisition of the category. In this study, because the learners were beginners and were exposed to formulaic sequences foremost in the state school setting, the sampling included formulaic sequences from Magic Book 1. It included adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations, lexical phrases, sentence heads, and institutionalized expressions. Instances of the formulaic sequences selected for the measures can be seen in Appendix A.

Therefore, pictures from Magic Book 1 as well as the first word of two-word combinations were used as prompts to elicit the recall of the English form of collocations (form recall). Following that, the participants were shown pictures from different stories
of *Magic Book 1*, which clearly defined the situation and the pragmatic meaning involved, and were asked to recall the utterances containing formulaic sequences that the characters in the stories produce (form recall). After that, the same set of pictures were shown again and participants were asked to recognize which formulaic sequence exemplified the meaning and situation in the picture from two alternatives whose written and spoken versions were given (they were shown on a piece of paper but also read aloud by the administrator; form recognition).

### 3.5.2 Measurement of Oral Proficiency

As has been emphasized before, lexical knowledge is a complex construct. It is not primarily of an explicit or declarative nature like the things that the learners can describe or say about words, but foremost implicit or procedural knowledge, meaning how well the learner can use the lexical items in language use (DeKeyser, 2003). For this reason, it was decided that oral proficiency would be measured in this study to determine whether young L2 speakers were able to employ their lexical knowledge in a fluent, accurate, and appropriate way in language communication, and, more specifically, in spoken narratives.

In this study the variable researched is conceived as having the ability to aid learners to *come across* as proficient learners, rather than actually improve their proficiency. This is the reason why this study measures perceived oral proficiency as exemplified by the scores attributed to participants by judges. Measuring oral proficiency can prove a thorny issue since it is a complex measure that includes the interplay of several factors or parameters, such as fluency, accuracy and range of expressions which are also difficult to define, or measure. What is more, there is the difficulty of obtaining objective judgements from scores of different assessors of oral proficiency. Taking these
into account, it was decided that two judges would be employed in order to downscale the subjectivity in the judgements. If judges show a similar scores in their evaluation of oral proficiency for the same participants, this implies that the speaker is likely to be assessed similarly by other assessors as well.

Therefore, two judges were asked to provide assessment of the oral proficiency of the young learners participating in the study. The first judge was the researcher (a non-native EFL teacher with 12 years of teaching experience in young learners called judge A henceforth) and the second blind judge was a non-native EFL teacher (14 years of teaching experience with young learners, called judge B henceforth). Judge B was unaware of the purpose of the experiment and was asked to listen once to the recorded narratives and provide scores for oral proficiency. The scores for both judges were given on a scale from zero to twenty. The second judge was given guidelines for the assessment which clarified that she had to take into account fluency, accuracy, and range of expressions. Judge B did not interview the students face to face, so she was additionally asked to provide judgement on fluency, accuracy and range of expressions. For fluency, Judge B was asked to appreciate characteristics such as length of runs and speech rate as well as number and length of pauses and hesitations and was reminded that fluency was not identical to overall oral proficiency. It was also clarified that this assessment did not consist of simply detracting points for language mistakes but that it should take into account that these young learners are just starting to construct their own interlanguages as an inevitable stage towards acquisition.

The prompts used to elicit participants’ narratives were a set of pictures taken from the second unit in MB1 and depicted the story of Pinocchio. Students were asked to narrate the story of Pinocchio to the interviewer. In this way the participants were invited to produce their own free speech, but the story that they were asked to narrate was
presented in the materials in language containing formulaic language, which would most probably bias learners into using it in narration.

### 3.5.3 Formulaic Sequence Counts

Formulaic sequences are difficult to identify owing to their definition as word combinations that are stored in memory holistically and are retrieved or processed as prefabricated wholes or chunks of language. As a result, the fuzzy nature of the category of formulaic sequences (Wray, 2002) in addition to the absence of an agreed-upon framework for categorizing multi-word units especially for the purposes of language teaching (Granger, 2011) present certain challenges for the identification of formulaic sequences in the narratives of this study. This study is not a psycholinguistic study and did not involve the use of laboratory experiments. It was not, therefore, possible to obtain objective counts of sequences that were processed holistically by participants. In order to increase the objectivity of the counts, two separate judges were asked to provide scores for the number of formulaic sequences featuring in the narratives of the participants.

Two new blind judges (non-native EFL teachers with respectively 10 and 16 years of teaching experience in young learners), who were not aware of which students belonged to which group, listened to the recorded narratives and counted the number of expressions they considered to be formulaic sequences. Sequences that recurred in students’ discourse were counted only once (types instead of tokens). Both judges, who will be called judge X and judge Y from now on, had completed an MA course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and were, hence, familiar with literature on phrases and formulaic language discussed in the literature review section of this paper. The EFL teachers that acted as judges were, moreover, familiar with *Magic Book 1* and knew which phrases were used to present the story of Pinocchio in the materials. Judges
were asked to count only correctly formed sequences and were encouraged not to select phrases based on their quality or complexity. The criteria for the identification of formulaic sequences presented to the judges included that sequences counted as formulaic should be longer or more complex than the rest of the learner’s output in their narratives and that the sequence should be uttered with phonological coherence (Coulmas, 1979; Wray, 2002) without pauses and a continuous intonation contour and/or phonological reduction, when certain unstressed elements are fused or reduced. Some instances of expressions that were identified by both judges as formulaic sequences are listed in Appendix B.

3.6 Data Collection

In May, the participants were interviewed by the researcher one at a time (a non-native EFL teacher with 12 years of teaching experience in primary education). First, the measures testing the learning of formulaic sequences were administered in the order described previously in this section. In order to ensure the reliability of the language measures they were administered to two third-grade pupils who did not participate in the study at two different times. Their scores yielded identical results, showing that the test was reliable in measuring their learning of formulaic sequences. Following the administration of the form recall and form recognition tests, the interview for the oral narratives was conducted. It lasted about ten minutes and the pupils were asked to look at a number of pictures depicting the story of Pinocchio in Magic Book 1 and to narrate the story in free language production. With the students’ permission the interviews were recorded on tape. It was emphasized that they could just contribute as much as they could and that it did not matter whether they could not remember parts of the story. The narrative telling instrument was first piloted to two third graders who did not participate
in the study before it was administered to the participants so as to ensure that it was not too challenging and to detect any problems.

A delayed post-test was preferred over an immediate post-test for this research design for a number of reasons. First, an immediate post-test runs the risk of overestimating durable learning after the application of an instructional treatment, since attrition occurs in any learning and scores on delayed post-tests are invariably lower (Schmitt, 2010). On the contrary, a delayed post-test is a good measure of long term acquisition. Second, the different aspects of word knowledge investigated in this study (form, collocations, expressions, grammatical knowledge) may take longer or shorter periods to master and recycling will doubtlessly reinforce their learning. Third, an immediate post-test is an additional exposure which has the effect of increasing learning in a delayed post-test, since learners usually give tests a great deal of focused attention, which is believed to boost learning (Folse, 2006). This is particularly the case with young pupils in a school context.

3.7 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated for the vocabulary measures as well as for the oral proficiency measures and the formulaic sequences counts. The paired samples t-test was used to determine the statistical significance of the variation on FS recognition and recall scores by tracking the difference between the means for the two measurements for each participant. The independent samples t-test was used to determine the statistical significance of instructional group variation by tracking the differences in the means between the two groups of learners in terms of their form recall of collocations, their form recognition of
formulaic sequences, their form recall of formulaic sequences, their oral proficiency scores, their fluency, accuracy and range of expression scores in the oral narratives. The two-tailed significance was set at $p < .05$. Pearson correlations were performed to determine whether the two judges’ formulaic sequences counts correlated and whether the two judged oral proficiency scores correlated. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to determine whether the formulaic sequences counts of the two judges correlated with the scores of oral proficiency, fluency, and range of expression.

### 3.8 Limitations of Methodology

The method of this study presents certain limitations. The most significant limitation of the present study is the size of the sample. The sample consists of only 14 students, a number that makes any conclusions to be drawn from quantitative analysis of data tentative. In order to draw more definite conclusions, a larger sample is necessary and in this case this study could be viewed as a pilot study which could contribute toward the implementation of a larger scale study.

Another limitation is that the amount and type of instruction for both groups could not be tightly controlled because of the characteristics of the EFL educational context in Greece. Ideally, participant pupils would have received the same amount of EFL instruction and each group would only have received either the Lexical approach-informed type of instruction, or the traditional grammar-based type of instruction.
Finally, it should be noted that the data were collected at one point in time in Greece and they represent only a cross-sectional analysis of how instruction can have an effect on students’ acquisition and use of formulaic sequences and their perceived oral proficiency. If we are to discover any effect of differential instruction on students’ learning and use of formulaic sequences and on aspects of their oral proficiency, further research of a longitudinal nature is required.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analysis of the data and explains the results of the analysis separately for all the variables tested. First, the findings regarding the knowledge of FS will be presented, then the findings regarding the learners’ perceived oral proficiency and the use of FS in oral narratives, and, finally, the relationship between use of FS in narratives and perceived oral proficiency will be discussed.

4.1 Recognition of Formulaic Sequences

The experimental group (Magic Book Only, \(N = 7\)) outperformed the control group (Plus Private Instruction, \(N = 7\)) in the language measure testing the recognition of the form of formulaic sequences. The experimental group was associated with a mean score of 8.28 (\(SD = .75\)) and the control group with a mean score of 5.14 (\(SD = 1.21\)). To test the hypothesis that the students in the two instructional groups were associated with statistically significantly different mean scores of their abilities to recognize and select the form of formulaic sequences when they were presented with their meanings an independent samples t-test was performed. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s \(F\) test, \(F(12) = 2.94, p = .112\). The independent samples t-test was associated with a statistically significant effect at \(p < .01\), \(t(12) = 5.81, p < .001\). Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis that the groups that received different amounts and types of instruction do not differ significantly. On the contrary, the statistical analysis of the data confirms the fact that the group that was only
exposed to the materials inspired by a lexical approach was significantly better at their receptive lexical knowledge of the form of formulaic sequences.

4.2 Collocation Recall

The mean scores for the recall of the form of collocations were also higher for the group that was taught exclusively with *Magic Book 1* materials and a lexical approach (experimental group, \( N = 7 \)) than for the group which received additional private instruction of a very different, traditional type (control group, \( N = 7 \)), with means of 10.14 (\( SD = 1.77 \)) and 8.00 (\( SD = 1.41 \)) respectively. Application of an independent samples t-test revealed the better scores for the experimental group to be statistically significant at \( p < .05 \), \( t(12) = 2.50, p = .028 \). The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s F test, \( F(12) = .11, p = .741 \). Thus, the students who did not receive instruction at the private English school were better at recalling the form of adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations than students who received additional private instruction.

4.3 Recall of Formulaic Sequences

Finally, as can be seen in Table 1, the mean scores of the participants of the experimental group (\( N = 7 \)) were similar to the mean scores of the control group (\( N = 7 \)) in the test measuring their recall of the form of formulaic sequences when they were provided with their meanings in visual prompts, with mean scores of 2.00 (\( SD = 1.00 \)) and 1.00 (\( SD = 1.15 \)) respectively. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s F test, \( F(12) = .522, p = .484 \). When an independent samples t-test was performed, there was no statistically significant effect of group for the recall of formulaic sequences, \( p > .05 \). As a result, the hypothesis that young L2 learners
in the two groups differ significantly in their productive knowledge of the form-meaning link of formulaic sequences cannot be confirmed.

Moreover, a one-tailed paired samples t-test revealed that the young EFL learners in both groups participating in this study had significantly better mean scores in the recognition of the form of formulaic sequences \((M = 6.71, SD = 1.89)\) than in the recall of the form of the same formulaic sequences \((M = 1.50, SD = 1.16)\), \(t(13) = 10.562, p < .001\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collocation recall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.14 (1.77)</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.00 (1.41)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.28 (0.75)</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.14 (1.21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS recall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.00 (1.15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Oral Proficiency Scores

The two judges who evaluated the degree of oral proficiency of the participants in this study awarded very similar scores. Their respective rankings of the students showed a statistically significant positive correlation at \(p < .001\) (Pearson correlation coefficient \(r = .93\)) which is a reassuring result in ensuring their agreement.

The overall oral proficiency scores awarded by judge A (who interviewed the students) were higher for the experimental group \((N = 7)\) \((M = 14.85, SD = 1.67)\) than for the control group \((N = 7)\) \((M = 12.00, SD = 2.51)\) with means of 14.85 and 12 respectively. An independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether this superior performance in the spoken narratives as perceived by judge A was statistically significant. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via
Levene’s $F$ test, $F(12) = 1.35, p = .267$. The independent samples t-test was associated with a statistically significant effect at $p < .05$, $t(12) = 2.50, p = .02$. The overall proficiency scores awarded by judge B (who listened to the recordings) were also higher for the experimental group ($N = 7$) ($M = 14.85, SD = 2.11$) than for the control group ($N = 7$) ($M = 12.14, SD = 2.03$). Another independent samples t-test revealed this difference to be statistically significant at $p < .05$, $t(12) = 2.44, p = .03$. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s $F$ test for this analysis as well, $F(12) = 0.20, p = .889$. Thus, it can be concluded that both judges awarded significantly higher scores for their perceptions of the overall oral proficiency of students who were exclusively taught with Magic Book 1 materials and application of the methodological principles of the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) than for the students who also received traditional instruction at a private language school.

Judge B’s assessment of students in terms of their fluency was in accordance with her overall assessment. The experimental group outperformed the control group with respective means of $M = 15.42$ ($SD = 2.07$) versus $M = 11.42$ ($SD = 2.69$). This difference was found to be statistically significant at $p < .01$ when an independent samples t-test was performed, $t(12) = 3.11, p = .009$. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s $F$ test for this analysis as well, $F(12) = 4.14, p = .532$. On average, the experimental students also appeared to make a better impression to this judge with reference to the parameters of accuracy ($M = 14.28$ versus $M = 11.85$) and range of expression ($M = 13.57$ versus $M = 12.85$), but these differences between the scores of the two groups were not found to be statistically significant for either parameter ($p > .05$). However, the higher scores awarded by judge B to students of the experimental group for their perceived accuracy were close to being significant ($p = .08$).
4.5 Formulaic Sequence Counts

Judges X and Y scores gave quite comparable counts of what they considered to be instances of use of formulaic sequences in learners’ narratives; they both counted a mean of three formulaic sequences per student on average and both gave students in total the same minimum and maximum scores as Table 2 illustrates, although there was more variability in the counts of formulaic sequences of judge X than of judge Y, as can be seen from the standard deviations. Their respective rankings of the students in terms of the number of formulaic sequences they used in their spoken narratives when a Pearson correlation was conducted showed a significant positive correlation at $p < .01$ ($r = .882, p < .001$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FS Counts</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judge X</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>6,00</td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>2,03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Y</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>6,00</td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>1,83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the counts by both judges the experimental group tended to use more instances of formulaic sequences than the control group. The means in judge’s X counts were four for the experimental ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.82$) and two for the control group ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.82$). The means in judge’s Y counts were likewise four for the experimental group ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.63$) and two for the control group ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.52$). This effect of instructional group on use of formulaic sequences in spoken narrative production of young students was found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$ with the application of an independent samples t-test for judge Y, but not for judge X, $t(12) = 2.36, p = .036$, as one can see in Table 3. The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s $F$ test for this statistical analysis as well, $F(12) = .522, p = .484$. 
However, judge X’s differences in formulaic sequence counts between the two groups was close to being statistically significant, \( p = .06 \). Therefore, the students in the two instructional groups differed significantly with reference to the amount of formulaic sequences they used in their oral narratives based on how these sequences were identified as formulaic by a blind judge (judge Y).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Instructional Group Differences for FS counts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FS Counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Correlations between Oral Proficiency Scores and Formulaic Sequence Counts

We now proceed to test the hypothesis that the significantly superior performance of students in the experimental group with regard to their overall oral proficiency and fluency as was perceived by their spoken narrative production can in fact be attributed to their increased use of instances of formulaic sequences in the same narratives. For this purpose, a number of Pearson correlations were performed. The Pearson correlation coefficients that were calculated suggest that the use of formulaic sequences can indeed impact on how fluent and proficient speakers these students are perceived as being. More specifically, both judges’ formulaic sequence counts were found to positively correlate with judge A’s assessment of students’ overall oral proficiency at \( p < .01, \ r = .864 \) and \( r = .891 \). Likewise, both judges’ FS counts were significantly positively correlated with judge B’s evaluation of students’ oral proficiency at \( p < .01, \ r = .912 \) and \( r = .942 \).
It was also hypothesized for the purposes of this study that L2 learners’ use of formulaic sequences in their spoken narratives would be able to contribute positively to their being perceived as fluent and accurate L2 speakers and as displaying a good range of expression in their speech. These hypotheses were, therefore, tested with the application of further Pearson correlations. As can be seen from the Pearson correlation coefficients that were calculated in Table 4, all three of these parameters affecting oral proficiency were found to be significantly correlated with both judges’ counts of formulaic sequences in students’ spoken productions. More specifically, correlations of FS counts with judge B’s scores on fluency were found to be significant at $p < .01$ with coefficients of $r = .923$ and $r = .875$ respectively. In addition, FS counts correlated significantly with judge B’s scores on range of expression at $p < .01$ with coefficients of $r = .797$ and $r = .752$ respectively. Finally, FS counts correlated significantly with judge B’s scores on students’ accuracy in spoken narratives at $p < .01$ with coefficients of $r = .895$ and $r = .751$ respectively. It can, thus, be concluded that use of formulaic sequences in the speech of these young pupils can play a positive role in making them come across as proficient, fluent, and accurate speakers who have a good range of expression in English.
4.7 Qualitative Analysis of Formulaic Sequence Use

To begin with, the L2 learners participating in this study tended to score better at recalling the form of collocations for adjective-noun than for verb-noun collocations. In addition, most of them faced difficulties in recalling multi-word verb-noun collocations, such as take off your coat, more so than with single-word verb-noun collocations such as do a puzzle.

Secondly, use of formulaic sequences in narratives shows that learners were generally able to display more mastery of shorter, simpler formulaic sequences (Super!), especially those which were connected with specific gestures such as Come on! and those who carried emotional meaning such as I’m sorry!. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral proficiency scores</th>
<th>Correlation with FS counts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Judge X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental (N =7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (N =7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge A overall scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.85 (1.67)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00 (2.51)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.500</td>
<td>&lt; 0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge B overall scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.85 (2.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.14 (2.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.446</td>
<td>&lt; 0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.42 (2.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.42 (2.69)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.111</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.28 (1.70)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.85 (2.91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.905</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of expression scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.57 (2.29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.85 (2.26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, formulaic sequences were uttered in students’ narratives with phonological consistency without internal pauses and with a continuous intonation contour, whereas the rest of their spoken output was characterized by long and frequent pauses. Moreover, the formulaic sequences the participants used in their oral narratives displayed were lengthier and more syntactically complex than their creative speech as was evidenced by their total output. For example, learners who were able to produce a run of speech as long as *star light, star bright, can I be a boy tonight?* did not produce other runs of speech as lengthy as this one or did not use the verb *can* in other contexts.

Finally, there was ample evidence for partial learning of formulaic sequences in the learners’ oral production supporting the incremental nature of lexical acquisition for each type of vocabulary knowledge separately. For example, learners produced sequences whose phonological forms had not been mastered. The findings of the study will now be discussed in relation to relevant literature in the field.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Despite the small number of participants and the fact that the students who attended the private language school had received almost twice the amount of EFL instruction than the experimental group, the positive effects of an exclusive lexical approach were adequate to make the majority of the results of the study statistically significant.

To begin with, young L2 learners in both groups were significantly better at recognizing than at recalling the form of formulaic sequences. This finding is in agreement with research findings of measurement studies which indicate that these two forms of testing are different and require separate processing strategies (Cariana & Lee, 2001; Jonassen & Tessmer, 1996). Recognition tests typically involve activities where learners are asked to select or guess the correct response from the alternatives given such as the measure used in the present study. Such tests may, therefore, boost any existing traces in memory (McDaniel & Mason, 1985). In contrast, recall of lexical items demands the production of responses from memory. It is, thus, more difficult than recognition because learners must search for the correct response within the representations in their mental lexicons (Cariana & Lee; Glover, 1989; McDaniel & Mason).

More importantly, learners in the experimental instructional group who were solely taught with the lexically informed materials (Magic Book 1) and methodology significantly outperformed their control counterparts who were also taught more traditionally with an explicit grammar approach at the tasks of recognition of the form of formulaic sequences, but not at the recall of formulaic sequences other than collocations. The value of this finding also rests on the fact that the same measurement instrument was used to elicit both the recognition and the recall of the form of the same target formulaic
Acquisition of Formulaic Sequences

sequences which makes a comparison between receptive and productive mastery possible. This finding supports findings in second language acquisition studies which have shown that the development of receptive mastery of lexical items precedes productive mastery. For example, studies such as those by Fan (2000) and Laufer and Paribakht (1998) have reached the conclusion that about half to three quarters of vocabulary that learners know receptively is also known productively. Nevertheless, other studies have estimated even lower percentages for productive knowledge of lexical items compared to receptive knowledge (Laufer, 2005). Laufer and Goldstein (2004) who devised the categorization of vocabulary knowledge (the form-meaning link in particular) adopted in this study also found that active recall was more difficult than active recognition in a hierarchy of difficulty for L2 learners in a variety of different learning contexts.

Melka (1997) proposes that receptive and productive mastery are situated along a continuum and that as knowledge of a lexical item increases gradually, receptive mastery can change into productive mastery. In contrast, Meara (1997) suggests a different model of acquisition in which receptive and productive knowledge differ with relation to the way lexical items are organized in the mental lexicon. He believes that items that are known productively are connected to other items in the mental lexicon, but that items that are known receptively have no links in a learner’s mental lexicon and need external stimuli to be recalled effectively. In fact, when young learners in this study were presented with external stimuli (the spoken and written forms of FS) they were able to recognize them. Since the young L2 learners in this study are beginner learners who are just starting to develop their lexical knowledge, the findings suggest that they have developed the easier, receptive aspects of knowledge of these formulaic sequences first. It is hypothesized that productive mastery of the form-meaning link for these formulaic
sequences will develop later when more knowledge for these lexical items is gained, or when these items become connected to other items in the learners’ mental lexicons.

Furthermore, the improved performance on the recognition of the form of FS on behalf of the pupils in the experimental group can be interpreted on the basis of the type of instruction they received. The methodology and the activities they were exposed to emphasized awareness-raising of FS, which is believed to promote mainly their receptive linguistic abilities. Lewis (1997) claims that “conscious awareness of what constitutes a possible chunk provides learners with a tool that enables them to process input more effectively” (p. 260). Indeed, Granger (2011) holds the view that “the most exciting contribution of the lexical approach... is its promotion of language awareness activities” (p. 7) and cites a number of studies that have reported successful application of phrase-noticing in teaching (Conzett, 2000; Deveci, 2004; Hamilton, 2001; Kavaliauskienė & Janulevičienė, 2001; Woolard, 2000). Valuing receptive practices in the teaching of both vocabulary and grammar is an essential change of emphasis that language teachers are urged to implement in a lexical approach (Lewis, 1993; 2002) compared to more traditional formal productive vocabulary practice.

On the other hand, the fact that the control group did not exhibit the same ability to recognize chunks and to recall collocations may be due to the interfering role of their additional EFL instruction. Lewis (1993) believes that “language teaching – often obsessed with teaching rather than learning – may have introduced counter-productive methodology by insistence on [an] essentially synthetic approach” (p. 96). He suggests that breaking up language into its component parts essentially misguides learners in their approach to language learning and can have detrimental and lasting consequences: “formal teaching...may be counterproductive in that it frequently directs the learners’ attention to individual words or grammatical structures that...are not the fundamental
components of language” (Lewis, 2002, p. 260). He, therefore, warns against practices of emphasizing analyticity in language teaching: “Don’t break language down too far in the false hope of simplifying: your efforts, even if successful in the short term, are almost certainly counterproductive in terms of long-term acquisition” (Lewis, 2000, p. 133). Significantly, the type of additional instruction that the pupils in the control group received followed a synthetic approach to learning since it was based on analysis of language through grammatical rule-based explanation and treated lexis as the teaching of individual words rather than lexical phrases and chunks.

The students in the experimental group were, furthermore, able to recall more collocations (two-word combinations) and to use significantly more instances of formulaic sequences in their freer speech narrative productions. The different instructional approaches can, therefore, lead to varying degrees of productive lexical knowledge as well in both more controlled elicitation test formats and in freer speech production tasks. Lexical chunks are believed to be learnt more easily because it is easier to deconstruct a chunk than to construct it (Lewis, 2002) and they are believed to constitute more memorable language for learners than single words because they are frequent in input and closely associated with specific situations (Porto, 1998). Lewis (2000) believes that learning lengthier multi-word strings promotes the production of natural language: “The larger the chunks are which learners originally acquire, the easier the task of re-producing natural language later” (Lewis, 2000, p. 133). He bases this claim on the observation that language production consists of processes which are essentially different than language analysis: “We have already seen that learners acquire most efficiently by learning wholes which they later break into parts, for later novel re-assembly, rather than by learning parts and then facing a completely new task, building those parts into wholes” (p. 190). Pupils in the experimental group may have been able to
recall more collocations and to use more instances of formulaic sequences in their narratives owing to the fact that they were not required to construct novel chunks. On the other hand, traditional methodology reflects the idea that every bit of language should be known by the students and frequently asks learners whether there are any words they don’t understand in texts or sentences. Explicit grammar teaching typically requires learners to analyze and construct language using bottom-up processing procedures. However, this emphasis on analyticity is not probably faithful in reflecting the actual way we process and acquire language and could potentially cause problems for learning. Top-down processing is important and should not be neglected in language teaching practices. An optimal balance between analyticity and formulaicity is considered to be most beneficial to learners’ acquisition of the target language (Wray, 2000).

With reference to the learning of collocations, the experimental students surpassed the control students in the recall of collocational pairs. Therefore, the purely lexical approach is believed to have improved these learners’ lexical accuracy with regard to collocation. This finding is particularly interesting on the grounds that knowledge of collocation has been found to be particularly problematic not only for lower proficiency, but also for advanced learners of English (Granger, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2005). Besides, effective teaching of collocation has proved to be a challenge due to the lack of sufficient input and frequent exposure in classroom teaching contexts, which could enable learners to gain insights into the appropriate co-texts that occur with specific words in specific contexts (Granger, 2011; Hoey, 2005). By drawing attention to the typical ways in which words co-occur, the lexical approach adopted in this study confronts this learning difficulty early on in the acquisition process, which could lead to better intuitions about collocation in the long run.
The results of the present study provide additional research evidence that FS can play a facilitating part in the promotion of L2 learners’ oral proficiency, and more specifically, to a number of parameters that constitute and shape it, such as fluency, accuracy, and range of expression. These findings support the widely supported view that formulaic language lies at the heart of natural and fluent speech and allows speakers to produce fluent stretches of discourse (Pawley & Syder, 1983) with statistically significant results. The findings support the claim that “it is our ability to use lexical phrases that helps us speak with fluency” (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 32) and that their mastery can develop fluency at early stages of learning, which in turn builds a sense of achievement and motivation on the part of learners (Porto, 1998). The findings of the study are concordant with the literature on formulaic sequences functioning as facilitators of L2 speakers’ fluency for adult classroom learners (Boers et al., 2006; Bolander, 1989; Raupach, 1984; Wood, 2006; Yorio, 1980). In particular, for the adult German learner of French that Raupach (1984) studied the use of more idiomatic phrases, discourse markers and fillers resulted in less pauses and longer stretches of fluent speech. Likewise, Dechert (1983) found that the speech of a German learner of English was more continuous and fluent when she used formulaic language and characterized formulaic sequences ‘islands of reliability’ to indicate their significant role in providing the basis for fluent and accurate spoken output through allowing for planning and uttering speech under real-time conditions. For child second language learners of a pre-school age findings also suggest that formulaic sequences were used as a strategy of extending linguistic performance beyond their limited levels of competence and shortcutting the processing route to remain fluent (Huang & Hatch, 1978; Wong Fillmore, 1976). Likewise, the three children aged nine to eleven years old that were observed by Ellis (1984) in the beginning of their EFL
classroom instruction were also found to use a great number of formulaic sequences in order to manage classroom interaction and communication.

The findings, furthermore, corroborate the hypothesis that an instructional method which emphasizes noticing of formulaic sequences and follows an implicit and discovery learning approach to the teaching of grammar is more effective in making young L2 learners come across as fluent, proficient L2 speakers than if this method was complemented with a more traditional teaching methodology which preserves the traditional dichotomy between grammar and lexis, neglects formulaic language and phraseology, and relies heavily on explicit teaching of grammatical rules and single words.

These findings agree with previous research testing the effectiveness of pedagogical chunking, as it was proposed by Michael Lewis in his *Lexical Approach* (1993; 2002), when applied to older and more advanced EFL learners. Boers et al. (2006) compared nonnative university students who were taught with an emphasis on noticing formulaic sequences with control students who focused on paradigmatic relations in language, such as synonyms and antonyms, and confirmed that this change of emphasis in instructional practices led to increased overall oral proficiency, fluency, and range of expression. It was not found, however, to be effective in improving the perceived accuracy of L2 learners’ speech in conversation. In the present study the effect of the instructional intervention was evident only in the perceptions of overall oral proficiency and fluency, but was not significant for perceptions of accuracy and range of expression in learners’ oral narratives. This difference in findings could be attributed to the different language proficiency the participants of the studies possess. The young pupils participating in the present study were low proficiency L2 learners who were able to make very limited contributions to spoken production which were essentially
characterized by inaccurate and inappropriate language. Their speaking fluency was just emerging, and their speech was characterized by dysfluency markers, such as a large number of long pauses and hesitations. These results are, therefore, congruent with the belief that accuracy is the last element of competence that can be acquired ultimately towards the end of the language learning process (Lewis, 1993).

What is more, these findings seem to suggest the nature of the experimental instruction’s facilitating effect. The L2 children in the experimental group were perceived as more proficient L2 speakers with regard to their perceived fluency, rather than other factors contributing to oral proficiency such as their accuracy, or the appropriate use of a range of expressions. The distinctive characteristic of fluency as a component of oral proficiency lies in that it is exclusively linked to performance (Lennon, 1990). Thus, Lennon’s (1990) definition of fluency as “an impression on the listener’s part that the psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently” (p. 391) appears to concur with the facilitating role that formulaic language is believed to play in saving processing effort in planning and producing speech for these L2 learners. A fluent speaker demonstrates the ability to present an intended message without uncovering the working of the production mechanisms involved (Lennon, 1990), and this can be achieved for these low proficiency L2 learners through the use of memorized prefabricated formulaic sequences which are automatically retrieved as wholes from their long-term memories. Skehan (1998) notes that in real-time spontaneous speech “we rely on such chunks to ease processing problems, using them to ‘buy’ processing time while other computation proceeds, enabling us to plan ahead for the content of what we are going to say, as well as the linguistic form” (p. 40). In this way, “the activities of planning and uttering can be executed nearly simultaneously” (Rehbein, 1987a, p. 104) improving fluency. Peters (1983) argues that the high pragmatic
utility of formulaic sequences appears to facilitate fast and fluent communication as they can bypass the process of constructing novel utterances.

Finally, the qualitative analysis of the findings bears certain similarities in the literature of lexical acquisition and use. To begin with, L2 learners in this study faced more difficulties in recalling the form of verb-noun than adjective-noun collocations. In fact, psycholinguistic experiments offer evidence that nouns are much easier to learn than verbs perhaps due to their imageability and concreteness as well as the fact that they do not have argument structures (Ellis & Beaton, 1993). Imageability is concerned with the ease of imagining a concept, while concreteness is “a variable that expresses the degree to which a word (or, rather, the entity the word refers to) can be experienced by the senses” (de Groot, 2006, p. 473). De Groot claims that L2 translations of concrete L1 words are learned significantly better than those of abstract words. Actually, the adjective-noun collocations tested in this study were very concrete food and drink items such as green salad and iced tea.

The two concepts of concreteness and imageability are related since concrete lexical items are usually easier to imagine. However, abstract entities such as “words with strong emotional or evaluative connotations” are typical exceptions to this tendency (de Groot, 2006, p. 473). This can explain the finding that learners appeared to learn better formulaic sequences which carried strong emotional connotations such as Oh, no!, I’m sorry!, and Super! as well as sequences which could and were linked in the process of instruction to extralinguistic cues, such as bodily movements and gestures, like Come on!.

Bahns, Burmeister, and Vogel (1986) also found what they termed expressive formulas to be the first to be acquired in the development of formulaic use they studied in their research. The category of expressive formulas they found in the speech of children acquiring a second language reflected a sudden state of mind, such in shut up or thank
you which appears to match sequences such as oh, no, I’m sorry, and super that the participants of this study had learned well. Other formulaic sequences for which learners in this study demonstrated mastery such as let’s go and come on are similar to the directive formulas in Bahns et al.’s (1986) study, which indicates intention to change the hearer’s behavior.

The problems learners encountered in this study with phrasal verbs compared to one-word verbs in the recall of verb-noun collocations agree with findings of research studies that confirm the difficulty learners have with these frequent idiomatic expressions. In their study, Dagut and Laufer (1985) found that learners preferred one-word verbs rather than their phrasal verb equivalents despite the fact that the multi-word verbs are considered more appropriate for use in the informal spoken contexts (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007) which were investigated in the study.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

The results of the study corroborate the general hypotheses presented in the methodology section of this paper:

1. An instructional method that exclusively emphasizes noticing of formulaic sequences can be more successful in helping L2 learners acquire formulaic sequences than if this method is combined with traditional teaching.

2. The use of formulaic sequences (standardized phrases such as collocations, lexical phrases, sentence stems and institutionalized expressions) can help young language learners come across as proficient speakers when narrating a story in the L2.

3. An instructional method that raises young language learners’ awareness of L2 formulaic sequences can improve the degree of proficiency these learners are perceived as having (in this experiment, by language teachers) to a greater extent than if it is combined with a traditional instructional method.

The use of formulaic sequences was particularly beneficial to perceptions of learners’ fluency. The research evidence also underlines the facilitating effect of the use of formulaic sequences on perceptions of learners’ accuracy and range of expression in oral storytelling. However, the positive effect of not being taught with an approach that upholds a traditional dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary was significantly more pronounced for the perceptions of learners’ fluency in spoken discourse, compared to perceptions of their accuracy or range of expression in speaking. The beneficial effect of an exclusively lexical approach was also evidenced in learners’ acquisition of the form-meaning link for formulaic sequences. More specifically, these learners displayed increased ability to recall the form of collocations and to recognize the form of other
formulaic sequences compared to learners who received additional but contradictory EFL instruction.

The present study presents a number of significant findings. Despite the fact that the L2 learners in the experimental group received almost half the amount of exposure to the target language and the fact that their control classmates received double the amount of instruction, they were still able to demonstrate significantly better learning at measures testing their recognition of formulaic sequences and their recall of collocations. More importantly, the experimental students were able to use significantly more instances of formulaic sequences in their spontaneous storytelling and to be perceived as more proficient and fluent L2 speakers by nonnative English teachers. If a chunk-emphasizing and chunk-noticing lexical approach to language teaching is so effective in helping young beginner learners foster their lexical knowledge and speaking skills, then it should be more widely adopted and capitalized on in materials and syllabus design and in language teaching methodology. On the other hand, if a popular traditional grammar-based approach is so counterproductive as evidence from this study suggests, its learning benefits are seriously questioned.

Still, the findings of this study are limited in a number of ways. First, the number of participants was small (N =14) and only two judges were employed in each measurement of oral proficiency and formulaic sequence counts. However, their inter-reliability was high as is evidenced by the ranking correlations in both pairs of judges. What is more, this study did not feature a thorough qualitative analysis of the use of formulaic sequences in learners’ spoken narratives, but focused on quantitative data. A more detailed qualitative analysis of formulaic sequence use would be able to offer more insights into their acquisition and appropriate use by these young learners.
Another limitation of the study is related to the low proficiency of the L2 learners which necessitated the use of a context-dependent instrument for eliciting their spoken narratives. More specifically, the experimental students in Boers et al. (2006) in contrast to the controls were able to develop strategies of noticing formulaic sequences in newly presented texts and to subsequently recycle their use in their own spoken productions. Likewise, in this study young learners were also able to notice formulaic sequences in the stories they were presented with in their learning materials and were able to recycle these sequences in their own oral narratives. However, the experimental students in Boers et al. did not show sufficient evidence of having acquired a large number of formulaic sequences which they could actively use in conversation as a result of the instructional intervention. Due to the very basic level of linguistic competence that the students participating in this study possessed, it was not deemed appropriate to measure their speaking proficiency in a completely free oral production that would not provide them with facilitating prompts like the pictures from the stories presented in the teaching materials in this study. This task would make very challenging demands on these young beginner learners with limited L2 proficiency. It would, therefore, make sense to test slightly more proficient young learners in freer interview contexts in future research so as to determine their ability to build a larger repertoire of formulaic sequences for active use as a result of instructional practices emphasizing their noticing and acquisition.

In addition, research into the development of these learners’ linguistic proficiency in more longitudinal research studies can investigate whether their superior performance in oral tasks is retained in later stages of language acquisition, and whether there is additional evidence of increased accuracy in the learners’ speech. Such findings could determine whether formulaic chunks can be used by young L2 learners in formal teaching contexts as raw data for the perception of the underlying system of patterns exemplified
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in formulaic sequences, and whether this increased awareness can also lead to better receptive and productive mastery of the grammatical and lexical system of the language. This assertion is based on L1 acquisition studies showing that children first acquire chunks and then subject them to analysis to uncover the underlying patterns and to extract syntactic rules (Wray, 2002). However, L2 acquisition in formal classroom teaching contexts is believed to lack the essential amount and quality of input to allow for this deconstructing process to take place causing scholars to be dubious as to whether mastery of formulaic sequences can promote acquisition of the grammatical system (Granger, 2011; Wray, 2000). On the other hand, child L2 learners appear more able than adults to use formulaic sequences as input for analysis which can promote their acquisition of grammatical and lexical competence (Wray, 1999). In addition, classroom-taught learners can also manifest greater ability to analyze such sequences to further their linguistic development, than L2 learners in naturalistic learning contexts (Wray, 1999). Thus, research into these learners’ acquisition of the grammatical system could yield interesting results.

The conclusions drawn from the present study underline the need to use the evidence of the facilitating role of formulaic language in second language acquisition and production in order to promote classroom language pedagogy. As Wood (2002) observes “virtually no classroom materials and programs are available commercially that capitalize on the vital significance of formulas in production and acquisition” (p. 13). The innovation of focusing on lexis and formulaic language and of facilitating their acquisition in the classroom through appropriate activities and tasks in *Magic Book 1* and *2* should be adopted by other material writers, as well. In addition, language teachers,
language school owners, and government officials should heed the relevant conclusions and incorporate the teaching of formulas in language classrooms both at state and private education classrooms.
References


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Appendix A

Examples of Formulaic Sequences Learners Were Required to Recognize and Recall

Collocations: take off your coat, go to school, do a puzzle, get a sandwich, clap your hands, play the drum, green salad, jam cookies, iced tea, apple pie, cherry juice, cheese sandwich.

Lexical phrases, institutionalized expressions, and sentence heads: no, thank you. I’m really full; I can see a rainbow; come, on; don’t be sad; where is everybody; it’s party time; it’s such a mess; I feel sick; sure, I can.
Appendix B

Examples of Expressions Produced by Learners in Oral Narratives which Were Counted as Formulaic Sequences by Both Judges

play hopscotch; do a puzzle/ do puzzles/ I’m sorry; Oh, no!/ let’s go; star light, star bright; can I be a boy tonight%; let me tell you a story; play on the swing; play on the slide; super; are you sure; you’re back home.