

Lexical Bundles as Formulaic Sequences

□ م. منى إبراهيم احمد
□

□ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية – ابن رشد

Abstract:

Using and learning formulaic language is regarded significant to learn language, yet studying lexical bundles did not take its sufficient attention in learning and teaching language. Thus, the current research will try to define and explain the uses of the lexical bundles as formulaic sequences. Studies about lexical bundles starts with the original study of Bengt Altenberg in 1993 and 1998. These scholars shaped the methodology to identify the combinations of frequency-defined repeated words and joined the grammatical analysis with the functional one in classifying them. Obviously, the method of defining and categorizing formulaic units only relying on the occurrence frequency and the wide use benefits as being methodologically straightforward, even if scholars utilized various criteria of frequency and distribution. The initial frequency that decides the bundles number to be contained in the list extended from (10-40) times/million words. When working with lexical bundles in such ways to compare individual words in corpora of various sizes, the results may be unpredictable; therefore, extra researches and studies are required to prove their validity (Biber, Conrad & Cortes, 2004).

Keywords: lexical bundles, formulaic sequences, word expression, idioms, collocations.

Introduction:

Expressions of multiple words are usually utilized and lexical bundles are of such kind with unlimited collocations that happen frequently more than anticipated and are regarded as constructing chunks in conversation, having a vital part in generating textual uniformity. There are a lot of modern studies that give emphasis to the significance of items with multiple words in speech. And these were studied and examined within various conditions like lexical phrases, fixed expressions, ready-made units and prefabs (Biber, Conrad & Cortes, 2004; Cowie, 1992; Moon, 1998). Furthermore, various criteria are utilized to describe and classify multi-word items. Early previous studies about longer word combinations were derived from instinctive evidences and not experimental ones in the actual usage of language (Nattinger, & DeCarrico, 1992; Cowie, 1992). However, current studies have confirmed the significance of lexical bundles being a chief part in consistent linguistic construction, as they stand for construction blocks of logical conversation. Conversely, this novel type of words which go after one another more often than anticipated by accident assist in forming meanings and participate in one's distinctiveness sense in a register. Accordingly, utilizing a certain group of lexical bundles shall identify the text as belonging to a certain register like academic text or legal text (Hyland, 2008: 1).

1 – Lexical Bundles: Definition, Features, Types and Functions:

The 'lexical bundles' expression was firstly utilized in "Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English" by Biber et al., in which it was defined as being frequent and repeated expressions apart from their idiomaticity and structural condition (1999: 990), and afterwards more identified by Biber and Barbieri as regular frequent sequences of 3 words and extra in a genre or a register (2007: 264). Various studies and researches, for instance, Biber and Barbieri (2007) utilize forty/million expressions, while Hyland (2008) selects twenty/million expressions. It is stated that "lexical bundles (LBs)" are of numerous characteristics differentiating them from other types of formulaic terms, they are very widespread, not idiomatic in meaning and have no perceptual salience, and lastly they do not often stand for entire structural units, but frequently link structural units, for example they start with a clause/phrase boundary, yet the bundle's final words are the opening components of a next structural entity (Biber & Barbieri, 2007: 269). This is, as it appears, because of the structural deficiency and non-idiomatic nature they have, in that lexical bundles remain exterior to the range of the lexical terms conventionally contained in the curricula of foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, presently an increasing consciousness of the necessity to include lexical bundles' open teaching in EAP curricula; this is proved by Simpson-Vlach & Ellis' (2010) Academic Formulas List, i.e. an experimentally derivative record of formulaic sequences for educational writing and speaking directed to educational purposes, encompassing a general central part of academic procedures distributed among multi disciplines and discipline-specific lexical bundles. To aid learners in controlling the usage of lexical bundles, they should recognize their structural and functional features. While small differences exist in the structural kinds of lexical bundles utilized in earlier researches and studies, we can guess that 4 main kinds of bundles exist as the following:

1. The components of verb phrases, including anticipatory constructions, passive voice, and dependent clause parts, such as "it is assumed to be", "can be seen as" and "it is possible that".

2. The elements of noun phrases pursued by a piece of a modifier, frequently of prepositional phrases such as **"the extent to which"**, **"the end of the"**, and **"a function of the"**.
3. Prepositional phrases pursued by prepositional or clausal components such as **"of the things that"** and **"at the end of"**.
4. Other kinds, usually more extended clausal constructions that frequently work as a formulae of politeness such as **"thank you very much"**, **"what are you doing"**, **"as well as the"** and **"have a nice day"** (Biber 2004: 153).

Possibly the most significant state for controlling lexical bundles lies in comprehending their speech purposes in a certain genre, register & discipline. It is referred that LBs are a type of pragmatic go towards bigger clauses or phrases, in which they work as speech frames in order to express new information (Biber & Barbieri, 2007: 270). The discourse function classification of LBs addressed in the current study relies on the classifications made by (Biber et al, 2004; Cortes, 2004; Biber & Barbieri, 2007; Hyland, 2008; Simpson-Vlach and Ellis, 2010). Yet, we should notice that because of their multiple functionality, which is promoted by their structural deficiency, there exist certain inconsistencies among the present classifications. Aside from the dissimilarities in the single categories super-ordinate and sub-categorizations, dissimilarities also exist in the ascription of certain recognitions of functional categories. Therefore, whereas Biber (2006) & Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) categorize **"on the basis of"** and **"as a result of"** as referential expressions indicating the reality representation, they are incorporated by (Cortes, 2004; Biber and Barbieri, 2007; Hyland, 2008) in the collection of textual arrangers creating reasonable relationships in speech. As a number of lexical bundles may perform several functions within a solitary occurrence, the dissimilarities between the categorizations mentioned above can be due to a difference in the range and the corpora structure utilized by scholars, influencing the chief functional specialty of bundles in particular registers, disciplines or genres. Therefore, corpora of a wider rigid sciences constituent appear to produce a bigger average of referential words, whereas the nature based more on argument and of social and human sciences leads to a bigger ratio of bundles doing the speech arranging function (Biber et al., 2004: 383; Nesi & Basturkmen 2009: 32). Extra proof of the multiple functions of lexical bundles is presented by the potential of **"as shown in Figure"**, **"at the beginning of"** and **"to have time"**. Yet, in spite of the difference in the LBs' practical meanings, they are usually supposed to perform a chief function that can be discipline- or genre-specific in certain cases (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012: 39-41).

Section Two: Lexical Bundles as Formulaic Sequences

'Formulaicity' as well as 'Formulaic sequences' are utilized to explain a phenomenon that includes a variety of word strings that seem to be restored and recovered totally from memory at the instance of utility, instead of being subjected to analysis or generation by grammar (Wray, 2000: 465). It is recommended to utilize the word "formulaic sequences" which is comprehensive including and covering all types of linguistic unit regarded as formulaic in all fields of research and study. The term "formulaic" bears connections of *unity*, *custom* and *habit* with it, whereas "sequences" signifies the presence of more than one perceptible inner unit of any type whatsoever (Wray, 2002: 9). Sequences of multiple words are studied and examined within a lot of rubrics including 'lexical phrases', 'routines', 'formulas', 'prefabricated patterns' (or 'prefabs'), 'fixed expressions' and 'lexical bundles'. All these methods describe the object of the study in a rather diverse words, and thus they give various perspectives about the utility of sequences of multiple words (Biber et al., 2006: 133). LBs are widespread nonstop strings of multiple expressions, which can cover phrasal boundaries with the aid of corpora. For example, **"don't worry about it"**, **"in the middle of the"** and **"I don't know whether"**. LBs are a branch of a bigger family of strings of multiple words, continuous or discontinuous, well-known as "formulaic sequences" (Tremblay et al., 2007: 258). Lexical bundle, as a term, is originated from the area of corpus linguistics. It was first invented, used and defined by (Biber et al.) in their book as mentioned before. They briefly say that LBs are merely word structure sequences that usually match in normal speech. They also add that lexical bundles frequently appear in groups of (3) words or more that always come together. These words should be utilized jointly in that a word is not joint with other words freely. Of these collections, we mention **"I don't think..."** and **"would you mind..."** (1999: 990). Alternatively, a mixture of 4, 5 or 6 words (phrasal in their nature) is equally less frequent in English language texts, some examples of these are **"all of a sudden ..."**, **"go and have a look..."**, and **"do you want me to do..."** (Ibid: 990-993).

Section Three: Lexical Bundles, Idioms and Collocations

Biber & Conrad (1999: 183) define idioms as multifaceted bits of frozen syntax, the meanings of which are not able to be derived from their constituents' meaning. They are typically full units in structure. Lots of idioms, for instance, function as verb phrases that may be substituted by a one lexical verb like "**kick the bucket**", which means 'die', and "**bear in the mind**", which means 'remember'. Idioms are somewhat unchanging expressions, which are full structural units of a meaning that is not derived from the parts. Nevertheless, idioms do not ever necessitate to be general expressions. On the contrary, LBs are sequences of words or expressions that usually co-occur in a register. They are often changing expressions, and we can not replace one word or expression instead of a sequence. Actually, most LBs are incomplete in composition at all (Biber et al., 1999: 989). LBs are consequently more general than idioms, stereotypical idioms like "**shake a leg**", which means 'hurry', and "**a slap in the face**", which means 'offense', are hardly ever attested in real dialogue and script. When using idioms, they typically occur in literature more than in real face-to-face chat. "**Shake a leg**" and "**slap in the face**", for example, occur fewer than (5) times/million words in literature, whereas they are very rare in face-to-face chat (Ibid: 989). In contract, collocations are links between two words, thus the words are more regular than anticipated coincidentally, meaning pairs of words that incline to occur jointly in speech. Collocations are statistical links instead of comparatively fixed unchanging expressions. In addition, the single words in a collocation keep the meaning of their own. Still, portions of the word extended meaning is the truth that it inclines to co-occur with a particular group of collocates (Biber et al., 1999: 989). Firth (1957: 14) points to a collocation as real words in habitual group. He utilized the two expressions "**collocation & collocability**" as well to explain the usual incidence of an utterance with other utterance or utterances. "**Auspicious**", for example, collocates with "**occasion**", "**sign**", "**event**" ... etc. While Palmer defines "**collocation**" as a series of (2) words or extra that should be educated as a vital entire and not portioned jointly from its constituent portions (cited in Cortes, 2004: 398). On the contrary of collocations, lexical bundles represent words frequently appear in groups of three words or more that constantly occur jointly. They can not be separated from each other for they should be utilized together. These words comprise sets like "**would you mind**" and "**I don't think**". Lexical bundles may be seen as extended collocations as their constituents customarily occur jointly to form a kind of interconnected meaning that can often be predicted from the company kept by these words. The sequences of multiple words such as "**present study**", "**above example**", and "**long time**" are usually described as collocational items. Still, in some cases they may emerge as lexical bundles, since they reappear habitually in longer sequences, especially when extended into "**in the above example**", "**in the present study**" and "**for a long time**" (Ibid). In conclusion, lexical bundles are different from further conventionalized or solid unmoving shapes, like "**idioms**" or "**collocations**", chiefly because of using them to do particular purposes. For instance, "**smell a rat**", "**it's raining cats and dogs**" and "**powder room**" represent phrases that emerge with non-certain purpose; "**how do you do?**" and "**A.....ago**". Alternatively, they may be utilized in speech to do the functions of saluting and expressing time relations (Nattinger & DeCamco, 1992: 36).

Section Four: Properties of Lexical Bundles

The term '**lexical bundles**', as notices, looks as if confusing and is not usually separated from other lexical portions like collocations and idioms. It is necessary to demonstrate the most important identifying and distinctive characteristics with which a particular set of words may be realized and illustrated as a **lexical bundle**. Moreover, with this kind of identification, other overlapping word sets may be eliminated and excluded. The most outstanding properties of lexical bundles are as follows:

a. Frequency:

LBs are defined as frequent expressions of utterances, apart from their idiomaticity and structural condition, as mentioned before. Occurrence frequency is the central property for LBs, in that a bundle must happen no less than twenty times per million expressions to meet the criteria, yet a lot of bundles happen further than (100) times per million expressions in particular registers. The incidence is extremely high in comparison with the incidence where other combinations of words occur, as in pure idioms, for example "**dressed to kill**" which occur (0.5) times/million words (Cortes, 2004: 400). It is thought that incidence has a further significance for studying sequences of multiple words for reflecting the degree to which a word series is saved, memorized and utilized as an assembled portion, with sequences of upper frequency possibly to be saved and memorized as non-analyzed portions more than sequences of lower frequency. Certainly, frequency is merely one measure of the degree to which the sequences of multiple words is

prefabricated. Sequences of idiomatic meanings are often uncommon, yet evidently prefabricated (Biber et al., 2004: 376). In conclusion, it is essential to stress that lexical bundles are sequences of words which recur repeatedly across multiple texts in a register. Other sets do not stand for lexical bundles due to not being used widely across multiple texts. Furthermore, locally frequent sets may demonstrate some dissimilarity in form, for example with an omitted word or an additional inserted word, whereas lexical bundle signifies a unchanging combination of recurrent words (Biber & Conrad, 1999: 184).

b. Non-Idiomatic and Incomplete Structure:

The term "LBs", as mentioned before, is defined as frequent series of expressions, like **"do you want to"** and **"I don't know what"**. The examples exemplify two distinctive properties of lexical bundles. They are often non-idiomatic with a clear meaning of the individual words like **"what do you mean"** and **"as a result of"**, and they are often incomplete syntactic structures (Biber, 2006: 134). One of the distinguishing characteristics that characterizes LBs from further kinds of frequent pieces of multiple words lies in their being usually deficient entities that happen at phrase and clause limits, for example **"I don't know if"**, **"in the case of"** and **"the point of view of"**. Most of them do not signify a structurally complete unit (Biber & Conrad, 1999: 183). Merely 5% of LBs in dialogue may be considered as complete clauses or phrases, whereas lower than five percent of the lexical bundles in academic prose stand for structurally full units (Biber et al., 1999). As an alternative, the majority of LBs link (2) structural entities. They start at a phrase or a clause limit, yet the bundle final words are the initial components of a 2nd structural entity. The majority of them link (2) clauses in speech, for example **"well that's what I"** and **"I want to know"**, whereas in educational prose they often connect (2) phrases, for example **"the base of the"** and **"in the case of"** (Biber et al., 2004: 377). Lexical bundles contain strong syntactic associations that ease their gathering into a number of essential structural kinds. The majority of lexical bundles in speech are clausal of the kind "pronoun + verb + complement" among others many, which means they build chunks for verbal and structural units like **"take a look at"**, **"I want you to"** and **"it's going to be"**. Conversely, in educational prose sixty percent of LBs are phrasal, portions of noun or prepositional phrases, like **"on the other hand"**, **"on the basis of"** and **"as a result of"** and. The majority of LBs in this case look as if building blocks for prepositional phrases or extended noun phrases (Cortes, 2004: 400). According to the aforementioned examples, the majority of lexical bundles are structurally incomplete units. In speech, a small number of bundles may be utilized as complete expressions, like **"that's a good idea"** and **"I don't like it"**. Actually, other bundles which can stand alone are often completed with a complement clause like **"I think I might"**, **"I don't want to"** and **"well I don't know"**. When a lexical bundle, in academic prose, is incomplete structurally, it usually emerges as a prepositional phrase which functions and works as a speech signaling device, e.g. **"in the same way"**, **"on the other hand"** and **"for the first time"** (Biber et al., 1999: 999). Briefly, the majority of lexical bundles surely have distinct structural links and associations. They often comprise the clause or phrase beginning in addition to the primary word of a fixed structure, for example, a prepositional phrase or a dependent complement clause. These word sequences may be considered as structural frames, with a slot following them. The frame works as a type of speech anchor for the novel information in the slot, informing the listener and the reader about the way to understand that information in terms of speech organizing, stance and referential status (Biber et al., 2004: 399).

c. Variability and Fixedness:

Lexical bundles are word forms' sequences that usually harmonize in natural speech. Typically, they are non-fixed expressions like **"as far as I know"** and **"a year ago"**. These represent phrases, bundles or chunks like many others in English language. Yet, they are different because they appear to be stored and remembered as being more predictable word sequences than ordinary construction. The phrase **"a year ago"**, for example, is a variation on a pattern that functions as time associating device in speech. A variable lexicon is incorporated into the grammatical frame **"a..... ago"** like **"a short while ago"**, **"a day ago"** and **"a very long time ago"** to signify a definite past time (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992: 35). While Cortes (2004: 400) states that LBs are permanent and unchanging as the computer program that produces these sets of words at established disconnected frequency do as for just a single shape of the bundle. Yet, this kind of fixedness differs from the kind of further sequences of words as it is controlled by frequency. Cortes notices, for example, that just the LB **"these results suggest that"** emerges as a repeated recurring expression sequence in the body of academic prose in biology. Consequently, there exist a number of lexical bundles or phrases that are completely frozen, i.e. invariable, like **"as well"**, **"by and large"**, **"let**

alone", while lexical bundles or phrases are quite flexible, i.e. variable. The phrase "*a.....ago*", for example, might allow variations like "*a week ago*", "*a day ago*", "*a month ago*" ... etc. Lexical bundles belong to a continuum. At one hand, there exist fixed unchanging phrases like "*by the way*" and "*have a nice day*", which do not subjugate to changes or adjustments. Yet, other bundles or phrases accept certain extent of adjustment, whether being syntactic or lexical. From time to time, the extent of possible syntactic adjustment is extremely variable. "*But also*", "*not only*" and "*as well as*", for example, are very flexible. In the same way, lexical content variation in a grammatical structure is but a relevance matter. Take into consideration the example of "*a.....ago*" which allows noun or noun phrase variations like "*day*", "*week*", "*month*", "*year*" and so on (Porto, 1998: 22).

d. Extension:

Here, LB is defined as a frequent series of (3) words or further. Bundles of (3) words and (4) words are usually selected over bundles of (5) words and (6) words. Longer bundles are often shaped via an expansion or a mixture of one or more shorter bundles. The lexical bundle of (3) words, for example, such as "*I don't think*" is utilized in a lot of bundles of (4) words, like "*well I don't think*", "*but I don't think*", "*I don't think so*" and "*I don't think I*" (Biber et al., 1999: 990-993). Smaller lexical bundles usually fit into longer bundles to complete the meaning and the syntax. It is obvious, for example, from their findings that the lexical bundle of (3) words such as "*I don't know*" has a relation with longer bundles such as "*I don't know what*", "*I don't know*", "*I don't know what to*" and "*I don't know what to do*" (Cortes, 2004: 106).

e. Fluency:

Fluency is usually utilized as a synonym for effectual verbal usage of language. It aids to elucidate in what way word or bundle sequences may be mind-learned and processed in order to ease fluent discourse yield (Wood, 2010: 9). Fluency greatly concentrates on time variables of discourse, i.e., discourse rate, modifications, amount and fluency of hesitation, pause location, and duration of runs of smooth discourse among pauses. A number of modern researches signify that a potential answer to speech fluency and smoothness is in mastering the range of formulaic discourse units, strings of multiple words retrieved from enduring and lasting memory as if they were individual words. These units of multiple words consist of routine expressions with social speech functions like "*how are you*" or "*have a good time*", lexical bundles like "*in summary*" or "*on the other hand*", and structures with tillable lexical slots like "*a year ago*", "*a day ago*", "*a week ago*", among other categories (Ibid).

f. Unanalyzed Units:

One characteristic of lexical bundles is that they may be saved, memorized and recalled comprehensively from the mind lexicon in speech generation. Fundamentally, the repeated incidence of these formulaic expressions helps at the production point and at the perception point. Also, it reduces deciphering and ciphering the two portions in generating and receiving an easy smooth conversation whether spoken or written (Pawley & Syder, 1983: 191). They are saved and memorized in the lexicon of the mind as being unanalyzed units the same as words. Due to their being ready-made, they are easily recalled and retrieve without any difficulty. And because lexical bundles are bound to context and high in frequency, they may be gained easily as wholes, and due to the recurring link of the function of form and context with no need to recognize their internal components "stored as units that can be easily retrieved". Lexical bundles that can be memorized consist of greeting formulas such as "*how do you do?*", back-channeling formulas such as "*yes I see*" and so on (Porto, 1998: 22). Similarly, Porto (1998: 22) states that as lexical bundles are pre-collected, they are helpful in producing fluent smooth communication. Also, they meet the idea of organizing speech and written texts. Therefore, they present indications to the listener or reader concerning the fluency of conversation and written text, for instance, "*that's beside the point*", "*the problem with that is*", "*what I want to do is*" and "*what I'm trying to say is*". It is usually thought that formulaic sequences together with lexical bundles like "*all of a sudden*", "*all in all*" are more competently processed, for individual remembered units, although composed of single words, may be rapidly and simply processed more than the same word sequences that creatively produced (Pawley and Syder, 1983: 191). Due to lexical bundles being stored as wholes and quickly accessed, learners are in no need to focus on grammar if they utilize these bundles. As an alternative, they move their concentration and attention to characteristics like relevance, consistency and suitability, thus the learners can organize their conversation at the level of discourse and keep the fluency of conversation (Porto, 1998: 22).

Conclusion

Finally, we may conclude that expressions of multiple words are a significant defining characteristic of academic discourse and a noteworthy constituent of fluent linguistic construction. Accordingly, there exist a significant attention in the last decade in defining, classifying and categorizing bundles so as to differentiate certain types and control the power of widespread series so as to flourish the process of language learning. While recognition matters continue and researches imply that corpus information alone can be a weak clue of whether LBs are saved as portions in the brain, their own incidence in educational genres gives evidence that they represent a significant constituent of academic rhetorical capability (Schmitt, Grandage, & Adolphs, 2004). The ubiquity of these characteristics implies that to have control over academic discourse needs an understanding to skilled users' inclinations for particular word sequences over others that may look similarly possible. Thus, if knowing how to utilize the more recurrent fixed unchanging phrases of a regulation may add to acquiring a communicative competency in an area of study, there exist benefits to defining these bundles to aid the learners in a better way in order to acquire the definite and explicit rhetorical performances of their societies.

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