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PRACTICAL GRAMMAR TEACHING

Grammar Constructions and Their Relatives

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Introduction: Constructions in Language Uses

In the past several decades, a few novel approaches to the analysis and teaching of English grammar constructions have been proposed. These are based on several theories that seek to account for how language structures are produced and understood. In cognitive linguistics, the coin *construction grammar* refers to a specific theoretical approach to grammar examination. This analytical and methodological innovation grew out of the inability of classical theories to account for linguistic formulas, idioms, and collocations (sequences of two or more words that are often used together in speech or writing, e.g., *fast food*, *take action*, *pouring rain*, *have a headache*) that dominate in language production and use (Croft and Cruse 2004).

In language research and textbooks, the term *construction* is usually associated with a linguistic form that has a particular grammar function and can be as short as a phrase or as long as a sentence (Hilpert 2014). In most traditional grammar theories, language users' grammatical knowledge is seen as a systematic organization of linguistic components, from which phrases or sentences are assembled. However, traditional grammars run into the problem of accounting for countless idioms (e.g., *to go Dutch*, *to blow up*, *to shut up*, *to lend itself to*) and collocations, which cannot be parsed (divided) into component parts and whose meaning cannot be predicted (Hinkel 2004, 2015).

Language research and analyses have long established that a great number of linguistic combinations simply sound "right" to proficient users of English and that collocations are very common in both speaking and writing (Wilkins 1972; Yorio 1989). More importantly, however, the combinations that do not occur frequently may sound unnatural and wrong, even when they are grammatically correct (e.g., *?to raise up a child*, *?to speak speedily*, or *?a protracted song*).[1]

Studies of real–life language uses have shown that L2 (second language) learners almost universally underuse formulaic sequences and constructions, compared to first language (L1) users. Another important research finding is that a majority of L2 learners employ constructions that are not found in L1 discourse at very high rates. To put it another way, word combinations, phrases, and sentences that are grammatically correct but that are simply not "how people say it" strongly dominate in L2 production and thus mark L2 constructions as unidiomatic and unnatural (Shin and Nation 2008: 340).

Typically, phrases and collocations are learned by hearing them being used frequently enough by other speakers or by reading them in various written texts. Idiomatic constructions are usually encountered in everyday language and acquired in the process of communication, be it oral or written. Specifically, regular, frequent, and repeated word combinations are stored in linguistic short- and long-term memory and are processed cognitively as "whole units" (Arnon and Snider 2010; Stemberger and MacWhinney 1988).

In general terms, construction grammar brings together several models of grammar that rely on research in human cognition to show that the knowledge of a language is comprised of vast collections of form–and–function pairings. Here, the term *form* refers to a particular combination of words, and *function* to the meaning, content, or purpose of the combination in conventionalized language uses. In construction grammar, constructions are the main units of language in discourse but not incremental grammar and vocabulary elements that require rules to assemble them into phrases and sentences. A construction is a unit that connects grammatical structures and their meaning. Proficient users of the language by definition have the knowledge of grammar that allows them to link specific structures to express certain meanings.

This theoretical model is based on the findings of its precursor—studies in phraseology in the 1970s and 1980s. Constructions are considered to be part of a lexicon–grammar continuum. Unlike traditional grammars, the construction approach does not assume that a clear–cut division between lexicon and grammar exists. All grammar units from contextually bound words (e.g., *steady!*, *lovely*, *certainly!*, *whatnot*), to idioms and grammatical patterns are treated as constructions (Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Kay, and Fillmore 1999).

Construction Grammar and Language Teaching

As has been noted, in language teaching and learning, construction grammar presents "a whole unit" approach to all kinds of conventionalized form-meaning combinations (Peters 1983; Wilkins 1972). In this light, the grammar of English is made up of various construction sets, e.g., quantifiers, prepositional phrases, and adverbs, which can be taught and learned as formulaic (and prefabricated) expressions (e.g., Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992; Wray 2000, 2002; Wray and Perkins 2000).

In their pioneering research in phraseology, Pawley and Syder (1983: 191) were among the first to take a close look at how highly proficient and fluent language users (e.g., native or near-native speakers) select phrases and constructions that are grammatical, natural, and idiomatic. According to these researchers, proficient language users thus demonstrate their "ability to produce fluent stretches of spontaneous connected discourse; there is a puzzle here in that human capacities for encoding novel speech in advance or while speaking appear to be severely limited, yet speakers commonly produce fluent multi-clause utterances which exceed these limits." Based on the findings of their studies, Pawley and Syder conclude that "fluent and idiomatic control of language rests to a considerable extent on knowledge of a body of 'sentence stems' which are 'institutionalized' or 'lexicalized'" (more on this later in the chapter). Sentence stems are units of language as long as a clause in which grammatical form and meaning are largely fixed. The fixed elements, in fact, represent culturally or pragmatically recognized expressions, concepts, or formulae.

Investigative reports on the uses of recurrent and frequent language constructions emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. In this body of research, such constructions are variously called collocations, fixed phrases/strings, lexicalized sentence stems, chunks, formulaic language, formulaic sequences, or prefabricated (or prefab) constructions (Cowie 1988, 1992; Coxhead 2008; N. Ellis 1996, 2011; Hilpert 2014; Howarth 1996, 1998; Schmitt 2004; Wray 2002, 2004; Wray and Perkins 2000). The main reason for the increased attention to these language units has to do primarily with the proliferation of electronic language corpora that have allowed for identifying and quantifying recurrent combinations of words and phrases that occur in real language production.

At present, researchers agree that, mentally and in language comprehension (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing), prefabricated constructions behave more similarly to individual words than structures that need to be assembled based on rules. According to some estimates, the number of such constructions in English is in the hundreds of thousands. Thus, it seems that learning to use L2 idiomatically is requisite for L2 learners who aspire to attaining proficiency and fluency that can enable them to achieve their educational, professional, vocational, social, and personal goals.

Although there is probably no single encompassing definition of construction grammar or formulaic language, prefabricated constructions and formulaic sequences include:

- Frequently recurring constructions (e.g., *Some people are never happy; what's this all about; according to the author . . .;* or *it remains unclear. . .*).
- Collocations (e.g., *to open an account; to give/receive advice; to deposit cash/checks; to do one's best; to keep in mind;* or *a good/bad mood*).
- Idioms, as well as phrasal verbs (e.g., *bring up/about/down/along/around; basket case; problem child/children; back to the drawing board; burn the midnight oil; piece of cake;* or *easy as pie*).

- Turns of phrase (such as metaphors) (e.g., *how hard can it be?; to start all over again; to be on the right track/to move in the right direction; to point someone in a new/the right/a different direction*).
- Conversational routines (e.g.,

   -Hi, how are you? -Great, and you? -Awesome!;
   -Thank you/I am sorry. -No problem;
   -What's up? -Nothing much. What's going on with you?).

- Set phrases (in which components are fixed in a certain *order*) (e.g., *one's best/a whole lot of/with all [someone's] effort; get it together; need(s) to get [someone's] act together/priorities straight/straighten(ed) out/up/[someone's] head in the game*).
- Proverbs (e.g., *two wrongs don't make a right; the squeaky wheel gets the grease; better late than never; no man is an island*).

Wray (2002: 9) provides one of the most thorough and careful definitions of a formulaic sequence: "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." It is important to note that this definition is only one of many, and various alternatives have been adopted by other researchers.

The purpose of this chapter is not to attempt to condense the vast knowledge and practice materials on, with, or about construction grammar and formulaic language. Nor does this chapter aspire to being a concise construction grammar manual. The goal of this chapter is to provide efficient tools and a few shortcuts for teachers and learners by means of presenting and illustrating uses of constructions in speaking and writing. These research-based and time-tested techniques for using constructions and formulaic expressions in the teaching of productive skills can greatly assist learners in developing facility with grammar and vocabulary expeditiously.

Key Advantages

In light of the fact that language instruction almost always takes place under great time and curricular constraints for many teachers and learners, it seems essential to maximize language gains, develop fluency, and make learning as efficient as possible. There are seven key advantages for teaching and learning formulaic sequences and prefabs:

- Formulaic sequences and grammar constructions can provide learners access to expressions in, for example, conversational interactions or academic writing, that may not yet be available to them in creative production (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992).

- Conventionalized expressions and constructions are usually easy to remember because they are deployed in specific and appropriate social contexts.
- Using language chunks in teaching and learning to speak and write in L2 is likely to be one of the few available expedient routes to relative L2 accuracy and fluency that leads to repeated uses and subsequent automatization (Hinkel 2004, 2005, 2011, 2015).
- A tremendous advantage of construction grammar lies in expedited learning, reduced workload, and developing fluency. For example, high-frequency academic constructions, collocations, and expressions can be learned as whole units, instead of just their elements that have to be further combined during the process of speaking and writing (Hinkel 2011, 2013).
- Differences and similarities between constructions allow learners to create new formulaic sequences in various combinations or to modify those that are already "stored away."
- For L2 speakers and writers, common grammar problem areas, say, with articles, verb tenses or prepositional phrases can also be relatively easily avoided when these are dealt with as whole constructions.
- In language teaching, a very efficient perspective is to look at grammar and vocabulary as a continuum of constructions, from highly systematic and regular (e.g., third person singular verbs or subject-verb agreement) to much more fixed constructions, such as collocations or idioms (e.g., *change is in the air* or *this evidence sheds a great deal of light on . . .*).

The construction grammar approach to language teaching can be employed with language elements of all shapes and sizes, from tiny bits, such as word prefixes and suffixes, to phrases to whole sentences or even to sets of sentences, including the perennial areas of learning difficulty, such as metaphors and idioms.

L2 Speaking and Interaction: Construction Grammar and Formulaic Expressions

Learning to understand and produce spoken language means being able to understand how language components combine and interact to produce meaning and discourse (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992). L2 learners need to become skilled users of words, sentences, and language elements to build their spoken discourse repertoire in order to participate in conversations as they progress.

Participating in conversations requires engaging in a range of complex cognitive and linguistic tasks. In social settings, the uses of language convey personal views and attitudes, as well as social values and relationships, in addition to the overt and easily recognized assumed purpose of exchanging information and "transacting" content (Coulthard 1985: 123). Conversations are jointly constructed as they unfold, with participants adjusting, modifying, altering, and tweaking what they are saying—or going to say—depending on the social situation and flow. In

the course of a conversation, participants' speech has to remain reasonably cohesive, coherent, fluent, socially appropriate, culturally suitable, as well as grammatically, lexically, and phonetically intelligible. In other words, conversing takes a little work.

A vast body of research on the pragmatics of interaction that saw the light of day in the 1980s and 1990s has demonstrated convincingly that conversational language and discourse are highly conventionalized, routinized, and formulaic. Some studies have found, for example, that in casual conversations, most exchanges are prefabricated and extremely stereotyped (Brown and Levinson 1987; Coulmas 1981; Levinson 1983). For example, in his investigation of spoken and conversational interactions among adults, Bygate (1988) identified an astounding array of grammatical and pragmatic uses of formulas. These were employed in an extraordinary range of functional contexts and for a practically unlimited variety of pragmatic purposes. According to the author, speakers' choices of formulaic expressions are continually adjusted to suite specific discourse and social contexts.

Based on extensive analyses of social interactions in general, many analysts have definitively concluded that it is not just conversational expressions and responses to them that are highly conventionalized, but also, by their very nature, social interactions "employ a number of standardized and stereotyped procedures" that mark and characterize them (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992: 114) (more on this later in the chapter).

Teaching the grammar-vocabulary constructions and formulaic expressions needed in conversation provides a number of important benefits for both teachers and learners.

1. Most casual social encounters are brief and highly structured. Typically, they consist of a handful of interactional patterns that can be easily expressed by means of formulaic sequences and prefabs. For example, greetings, conversational openers, topic nominations, closings, and partings are relatively simple and highly conventionalized.
2. Deploying conversational prefabs and routinized expressions can make learners appear to be more fluent than they actually are (thus potentially improving their motivation for engaging in social interaction).
3. In social interactions, pragmatically appropriate conversational constructions and formulaic expressions are not particularly numerous. They are efficient, effective, easy to use, and a priori accurate (if used without alterations).
4. Research has established that formulaic expressions often become a basis for a later development of creative language uses and communicative competence. L2 learners often internalize constructions and formulaic chunks and then later break them down for analysis and variations to expand their range (R. Ellis 1984).

It has been determined that much language acquisition among both L1 and L2 adults consists of the acquisition of formulas and memorized sequences. In the short term, repetition and rehearsal promote the development of long-term sequence representation and eventual language acquisition (N. Ellis 1996). Teaching and learning spoken and conversational formulaic sequences, similar to learning other types of L2 constructions, requires frequent opportunities for repeated practice, practice, and more practice. This is especially true with regard to those phrases and combinations that present areas of difficulty for learners (e.g., *make*-collocations and *get*-passives, as in *get married/it done*). It is also important to make sure that constructions are learned correctly at the outset. If they are not, accurate and productive variations of formulaic expressions may not be easy to construct. Through instruction, to increase learners' repertoires, many conversational formulas and routines can be added over time.

An extensive list of conversational, interactional, and/or relatively formal (semi-academic) formulaic constructions and ubiquitous spoken prefabs can be found in Appendix A to this chapter. "*Enjoy*," as they say in routinized North-American restaurant English prefabs.

L2 Academic Writing: Construction Grammar and Formulas

Currently, a great deal is known about essential grammar constructions for L2 academic writing, such as adverb phrases (e.g., *in this case. . ., according to . . ., for this purpose. . .*) or impersonal *it*-constructions (e.g., *it is essential/clear/has been established*). Similarly, much is known about how to teach various grammar elements and components, and grammar teaching materials for both teachers and students are published every year. In applying construction grammar to teaching L1 and L2 academic writing alike, research has shown that making use of formulaic expressions and learning "long chunks" of text, such as *the central issue/concern* or *according to XXXX (2015)* and their variations, is far more efficient and effective than assembling written text from text (Graff and Birkenstein 2015).

As Wilkins (1972: 102) comments, learning an L2 through vocabulary and grammatical units (chunks), instead of through discrete words or word elements, means one can often "cover in half the time what is . . . expected from a whole year's of language learning." Many adults can recite L1 or L2 poems or texts that they learned several decades earlier, and there is little reason to doubt that L2 learners are quite capable of similar feats in their L2 production.

Like spoken interactions, academic written discourse is highly and rigidly structured. The typical university essay that seems to dominate in higher education in English-speaking countries (and probably far beyond) is written to express an opinion, support a position, develop an argument, or present a research project. The stereotypical structure of the university essay, as well as most other types of

academic writing, consists of relatively well defined "discourse moves" (Swales 1990). These include:

- Opening/introduction (also called the statement of a problem, or topic priming).
  - ○ Topic nomination/thesis statement (as well as the statement of purpose).
  - ○ [Optional] statement of rhetorical organization.
- Body (a series of overtly marked rhetorical steps to develop the position/argument).
- Closing/conclusion (restatement, summary, and closing/conclusion).

These discourse moves are marked by formulaic expressions and grammar constructions that are specific to each category (see a complete list in Appendix B to this chapter). For example, openings/introductions can be identified by such statements as *For a long time xxx, it has been the case that yyy*; or *One of the most controversial/important/interesting issues/problems is yyy*. Thesis statements are also fairly easy to identify by their formulaic and prescribed forms: e.g., *The purpose of this essay/paper is to xxx,* or *This paper discusses/examines/investigates xxx*. In research, many such conventional and highly marked phrases are called institutionalized because they occur more frequently in certain types of discourse than in others (Howarth 1998; Pawley and Syder 1983; Wray and Perkins 2000).

In the production of written academic prose, using conventionalized formulas and prefab constructions is not a language skill that is innate in L1 users and writers. Nor is academic writing a universal ability that most (or even many) L1 writers come by in the course of their daily life. Typically, learning to write academic texts comes about in the process of schooling and education. Both L1 and L2 academic writers have to acquire an extensive range of language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, and idea organization (Cowie 1988, 1998; Ferris 2003, 2004). It is widely recognized in language research and pedagogy that developing academic writing abilities takes many years—sometimes longer than a decade (Hinkel 2002, 2003, 2009, 2011). A truly enormous amount of evidence has shown that L2 academic writers have a great deal of difficulty becoming proficient users of formulaic sequences, without which formal written prose probably cannot be produced.

As most teachers know from experience, even advanced L2 learners continue to make grammar and vocabulary errors in their writing. Generally speaking, inaccuracies in written prose can be more damaging and costly than, for instance, those in L2 oral production (James 1998; Rifkin and Roberts 1995). An important advantage of using formulaic expressions in academic writing is that learned prefabricated constructions are likely to be more grammatically and lexically accurate than those that have to be constructed based on a myriad of rules.

The following example demonstrates how many morphemes (tiny and medium-sized pieces of language) need to be put together in an introductory sentence string.

> _**It is**_ _becom**ing**_ _increas**ing-ly**_ _difficult/challen**ging to**_ _ignore/decide . . ._ [_to_— infinitive / _if-_ or _whether_–adverb phrase or clause]. . .

In this example, due to the grammatical and lexical complexity of the phrase and sentence elements, L2 academic writers can potentially make errors with impersonal constructions, tenses and verb forms, adverbial derivations, active/passive forms of adjectives, infinitives, and the like. All these error-prone grammar elements can be avoided when these and other similarly complex constructions are taught and learned as formulaic expressions.

To some extent, the uses of specific language features may depend on the discipline and context in which spoken or written text is produced. Rather predictably, business case studies, historical narratives, or descriptions of experiments in psychology may contain a higher number of past tense verbs than a paper that discusses generally applicable observations. For example, most introductory textbooks in philosophy, sociology, economics, or biology include high rates of present tense verbs.

Despite some amount of variation that can be noted in the grammar and vocabulary features of texts across disciplines and academic subgenres, many researchers have identified what some call recurring second language attributes in academic register and text that do not appear in L1 writing (Ferris and Roberts 2001; Nation and Webb 2011), e.g., incorrect verb tenses, verb forms, or noun endings. Other studies of L2 written text production have also uncovered a range of vocabulary and grammar features that require focused instruction and concerted effort from both teachers and learners (Nation 2009, 2013; Widdowson 2003). All these can be taught and learned in conjunction with the phrases and sentence stems (see Appendix B) where they tend to occur.

For a vast majority of L2 learners, the task of becoming proficient users of L2 academic vocabulary may not be attainable within the time commonly considered reasonable for the completion of their preparatory studies. A more feasible and attainable goal of increasing the vocabulary range in students' L2 writing is to work with prefabricated expressions—and lexical substitutions within them— that learners can use for building written texts in most academic tasks. For example, around a dozen reporting verbs can be employed to mark paraphrases, and they can be learned with relative ease while working on a writing assignment: e.g., _the author says_, _states_, _indicates_, _comments_, _notes_, _observes_, _believes_, _points out_, _emphasizes_, _advocates_, _reports_, _concludes_, _underscores_, _mentions_, _finds_, not to mention phrases with similar textual functions, such as _according to the author_, _as the author states/indicates_, _in the author's view/opinion/understanding_, or _as noted/stated/ mentioned._

A Final Note

Teaching formulaic expressions and constructions can be profitable for learners at any level of proficiency. For beginners, a small number of fixed or minimally variable expressions could be a good place to start. As the learner progresses, the constructions that mark conversational sequences are likely to be handy and easy to learn. In writing instruction, learning grammar constructions can take place in the context of early writing practice, say, when constructing formulaic essay openings with variants and substitutions, e.g., *Many authors/books/articles state/say/that . . . .*

As has been mentioned, in spoken or written discourse, formulaic expressions characterize discourse junctures and moves, and function as discourse organizers. A very effective teaching technique is to introduce learners to discourse openers first to help them understand how to begin a casual conversation or a piece of formal academic writing. A similar technique can be used with discourse closings.

To work with a few opening constructions, learners can practise conversational greetings, attention getters, or lead sentences in writing (see Appendixes A and B). Then, for instance, the practice can move on to formulaic topic nominations and progress further along the discourse structure. Practising conversational and written topic nominators can be highly efficient for learners who need to see the connections between openers, topic contents, and closings.

The greatest benefit of construction grammar is that it allows language teachers to work with more efficient pathways in practical language teaching. It is well known today that grammar constructions are a key component of natural language comprehension and production. Pedagogically speaking, a great deal of exposure to and practice with naturally occurring formulaic sequences in speaking and writing would be to learners' best advantage, as it is likely to promote language analysis and acquisition. As with all language teaching and learning, using diverse grammar construction types can also lead to learners' developing systematic variations within construction and thus increase their linguistic repertoire. Above all, however, it seems very important for teachers to be aware of and become familiar with formulaic sequences that find their way into practically all language uses.

Currently, a relatively large number of spoken and written constructions have been collected, catalogued, and systematized. Two short sets of formulaic constructions are presented in Appendixes A and B. This might be as good a place to start as any.

Sample Activities and Suggestions for Teaching

1. *Identifying formulaic expressions and prefabs in level-appropriate authentic texts.* Locate four or five (short) newspaper articles (easily found on online) and hand them out to the students. In small groups or as a whole class, learners are asked to note and make a list of formulaic expressions and prefabs. These expressions are counted to figure out their overall number relative to the

number of words in the texts. How common do formulaic expressions and prefabs appear to be? [A side question: Do you think that it is possible for learners to notice and recognize prefabs in texts: why or why not?] In English as a foreign language settings, the same activity can be repeated in learners' first language(s).

2. *Responding to formulaic expressions with appropriate formulaic expressions.* Create a worksheet of appropriate responses to formulaic conversational expressions in English. Learners are asked to match questions or statements to situational appropriate responses. For example:

Hi! How's everything going?	*Thank you! I study very hard.*
I missed the class yesterday. Could I borrow your class notes?	*I think, but I am not sure, that it's **on**[2] zzz (day) **at** xxx (time).*
When is the xxx? (day and time)	*Sure! I am afraid, though, that they are a little bit messy.*
Where is the yyy?/How far is xxx? (location)	*I am sorry, but I don't know. Maybe, yyy could tell you?*
Your English/Spanish/French is great!	*Great/good/fine. How about you?*

Discussion Questions

1. What do the terms *conversational formulae* and *conventionalized uses* mean when it comes to various expressions, phrases, or chunks of sentences? Do textual conventions exist in speaking and written genres other than the academic? Can you think of a few examples?

2. How do school-age learners develop the skills necessary to write formal school prose, such as book reports or small essays/compositions, in their first language, say, in English? When does learning to speak or write in formal academic language learning begin for L2 users who might be of any age, from elementary school learners to adults? How long might it take an L2 learner to learn to produce formal prose?

Essential Readings

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Notes

1 In linguistics, ★ (an asterisk) marks constructions that are grammatically incorrect, and ? (a question mark) marks something that is questionable but not obviously right or wrong.

2 The preposition *on* is used with days and dates and *at* with time points.

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APPENDIX A

Constructions, Formulaic Sequences, and Sentence Stems for Speaking, Presenting, and Participating in Meetings

When engaging in spoken interactions, each participant has a great deal to attend to, in addition to the grammar and vocabulary in their speech. For instance, there are such matters as sound, word, and sentence parsing, timing, pacing, articulation, stress, intonation, volume, pitch, facial expressions, and body language.

For L2 learners and users, the cognitive load (the total amount of mental effort, including the working memory, required to perform a task) and the amount of attention that are needed simply to converse can be occasionally overwhelming. Having a stock of grammatically accurate and socially suitable constructions can greatly ease the task, project a degree of fluency, and simplify the job of discourse structuring.

All of the following sentence stems and formulaic expressions can be used in teaching and learning a range of grammar constructions and vocabulary that frequently occur in spoken communication, formal and informal alike.

Getting Attention, Greetings, and Responses

Hey/hi/hello/Long time, no see
Good morning/afternoon/evening
How are you?/How are you doing?/What's going on/happening?/How's everything going?
Excuse me/Pardon me . . .

Responding to Attention Getters/Greetings

Hey/hi/hello, Good/Great/Fine/(and you?)

Nominating and Shifting Topics

What's xxx? Where's xxx?
Do you know/remember yyy? Have you heard about zzz?
. . .say . . .
By the way/As a matter of fact/OK, all right (so far) . . .
Not to change the topic/This is a bit of the subject/topic . . .
Oh, that reminds me of xxx/brings yyy to mind . . .
I'd like to suggest/mention/say something about xxx . . .
Speaking of. . .
This reminds me . . ./Oh, before I forget, . . .

Preclosings

Well, that's about it/I guess that's all of it/That's about it.
I should go/I gotta go/run/do/fly.
(it's been) nice/great/ talking to you/meeting you/chatting with you.
I shouldn't keep you/should let you go.
It's been fun/good to talk/catch up/to see you.
Thanks/Thank you (very much/a lot) (for xxx)/Much appreciated
I've enjoyed talking to you/seeing you (again).
OK, then/well/yeah/so far, so good.
Nice meeting you/talking to you/seeing you.
There you go/Here you are.

Closings and Partings

Bye/bye for now/ goodbye, see yah/see you later/see you around/well, so long/'till
  later/Stay well
So long/Toodle-oo
Have a nice day/rest of your day/afternoon/evening/time

Asking for an Opinion or Reaction

What's your opinion of . . .
What's your position on . . .
What do you think of. . .
I was wondering where you stood on . . .
Could I ask for / I'd like to hear your reaction to /your views on . . .

Giving Opinions

Strong Opinions

I really/honestly/strongly/firmly believe/feel/(think) that . . .
I'm completely/strongly/firmly/greatly convinced that . . .

There's no doubt/question (in my mind) that . . .
Without a doubt/question . . .
It's really/quite/very clear that . . .
I'm (absolutely) sure/certain/positive that . . .
It is my belief that

Personal Opinions

I personally believe/think/feel that . . .
Not everyone will agree with me, but . . .
To my mind/In my personal experience . . .
From my point of view, . . .
Well, personally, . . ./ In my case, . . .

Adding Reasons

And besides/also/in addition . . .
What's more/And another thing . . .
Not to mention that fact that/the situation with
Plus, the fact that, /Not only that, but . . .

Neutral and Tentative Opinions

I think that /It is possible to think of it as . . .
In my opinion/As I see it/As far as I'm concerned. . .
From my point of view/perspective/, / In my view, / From where I stand
It seems to me that. . ./I would say that. . .
As far as I am able to judge . . .
I think it would be fair to say that . . .

Agreements

Strong Agreements

I completely/totally/really/entirely agree that / with
I am of exactly/completely the same opinion

Neutral and Partial Agreements

I agree.
I think you're right.
I agree in principle, but. . .
I would tend to agree with you on that. . .
By and large, I would agree, but . . .
Although I agree on the whole/with most of what you say/have said . . .

Disagreements

Strong Disagreements

I completely/totally/entirely disagree with you.
I don't agree at all.
You are mistaken.
What you are saying/proposing/suggesting is not (possible/feasible/suitable). . . .

Softening Strong Disagreements

Frankly,. . ./To be honest . . .
To put it bluntly,/be quite frank,. . .
I am afraid/sorry . . ./ don't see how . . .
I doubt (that) . . .
With respect, . . .
This raises the problem of . . .
Possibly, but . . .
What I am worried about is/bothers me is . . .

Neutral Disagreements

I don't completely agree with you on that . . ./I really can't agree with you on that. . ./I can't say that I share your view . . .
I can't help feeling/thinking that . . .
I'm not totally convinced by your argument/that/what you said.
I can't help feeling that. . .

Softening Neutral Disagreements

I'm sorry, . . .
I'm afraid. . .
I agree up to a point/to a certain extent, but. . .
To a certain extent I agree with you, but. . .
You have a point there, but. . .
I can see/take your point of view, but (surely/have you considered). . .

Interrupting

May/Could I interrupt you for a moment/second?
Sorry to interrupt, but. . .// Sorry, but. . .
Excuse me for interrupting, but . . .
I don't want to interrupt, but. . .
If I could just interrupt you for a moment, I'd like to. . .
Can I add here that . . .//Can I add something/ask a question?

May I ask something/a question?
I'd like to say something (if I may). . .

Taking the Floor

May/Could I come in at this point?
But the (real) question is . . ./ I am sure you can see . . .
Could I (just) say something here (about). . .?
If I could just come in here/say a word about . . .
If no one objects, I'd like to say a few words about . . .

Commenting

Excuse me, but I'd just like to point out that. . .
Excuse me, but I think/believe (that) it's relevant/important/useful to add that . . .
I wonder if I could comment on/say something about the last/earlier point.
I wonder if I could comment on/add something here (on/about). . .
Before we go any further, may I point out/comment on/ note that . . .

Coming Back to a Point

As I was saying. . ./To return to . . .
To return/to come back/coming back to what I was saying. . .
I may just go back to the point I was making/what I was saying,. . .

Preventing and Preempting an Interruption

If I might/could just finish. . .
Perhaps I could return to this point later (on).
With your permission, I'd like to/rather finish what I was saying. . .
If you'd allow me to continue/finish/say, . . .
If you'd be so kind as to let/permit me (to) finish, . . .
Very briefly, . . ./I'd just like to . . .
There are two/several points I would like to make.

Correcting Yourself and Conversational Repair

The term *conversational repair* refers to dealing with problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding.

Sorry, what's the word I'm looking for?
Let me rephrase/restate this what I (just) said.
Let me put it in another way.
What I am saying is/trying to say is . . .

Sorry, I should just mention one thing.
Don't misunderstand me, . . .
Sorry, let me rephrase that.
If I said that, I didn't mean/intend to/have in mind that . . .
Sorry, what I meant is/was (this)/what I mean is . . .
So, just to give you the main points here.

Presenting and Making an Argument

Beginning an Argument

I would like to begin by. . ./to say a few words . . ./to comment on . . .
There are three points I'd like to make.
I would like to mention briefly that. . .
I would like to make a few remarks concerning. . .

Sequencing an Argument

To begin with. . ./First of all . . . /To get started . . .
Firstly,. . . Secondly, . . . Thirdly,. . . Finally, . . .
At the outset (beginning). . .

Introducing a New Point

The next issue/question I would like to focus on is. . .
Turning to. . ./(Now) I'd like to turn (briefly) to/address/focus on . . .
I would like to introduce a new point/matter/consideration . . .
Another matter/topic . . .

Adding a Point

In addition, . . ./I might add that. . .
Not only . . ., but also. . .
Furthermore, . . ./Moreover, . . .
And another thing/point/factor/consideration . . .
Just a small point, . . .
Perhaps, I should mention/add/note/say . . .
Oh, I almost forgot . . .

Giving an Example

Let me give an example (of). . .
To illustrate this point, let us consider. . .
I'd like to mention/bring your attention to xxx, as an example
A case in point is. . .
By way of illustration. . ./To illustrate, simply (take a) look at . . .
An example/a few examples include(s)

Balancing Points

On the one hand xxx, but on the other hand, yyy
In spite of zzz, I still think aaa/Despite (the fact that) bbb, I . . .
Although . . ., we/I should (also) think about/remember that . . .

Generalizing

On the whole, . . ./Overall, . . .
In general, . . ./Generally speaking, . . ./To generalize . . .
By and large, . . .
All in all, . . ./All things considered, . . .

Stating Preferences

I'd rather xxx than yyy.
What I'd prefer. . ./My preference would be. . . /Preferrably
I prefer xxx to yyy
The main advantage of xxx is (that) . . .

Concluding

Let me conclude by saying . . .
I'd like to conclude by stating that . . .
In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that . . .
Allow me to conclude by stating/saying/reiterating that . . .

Asking Questions

Introductory Words and Phrases

Actually, . . ./Well, . . .
Frankly, . . ./To be honest, . . .
As a matter of fact, . . ./In fact, . . .
Okay (then). . ./Alright . . .
As a point of departure, I'd like to . . .

Asking General Questions

Would you mind. . .? / Would you mind if I asked. . .?
I was wondering if you. . .?/I wonder if you could. . .?
May I ask. . .?

Asking for Further Information

Could you be a little more precise?
I'm sorry, but could you explain in a little more detail/Could you give us some details
about . . .?

Could you expand on that? /Would you please elaborate on that?
I wonder if you could explain that/elaborate on that . . ./ Would it be possible to . . .?

Stalling for Time

That's a very interesting question.
That's a difficult question to answer.
I'm glad you asked that question.
You've brought up/raised a good/important/excellent point here.
It is not hard to see / You will appreciate how important this point is.

Saying Nothing

Well, it's (rather/maybe) difficult to say. . .
I'm afraid I don't have enough information (right now) to answer that.
I'd need/will need to think about xxx/learn more about xxx /look into xxx further/
*   in greater detail*

Further Questioning/Looking for Clarification

It depends / I'm not quite sure what you mean by. . .
I'm afraid I don't quite follow. . .
I don't think it's quite as simple as that. . .

Asking for Clarification

Clarifying When Communication Is Not Heard

Sorry, I missed that. Could you say that again, please?
Sorry, I didn't catch/get that. Could you repeat it/that, please?
Would you mind repeating xxx, please?
Sorry, I couldn't quite hear/hear well.

Clarifying When Communication Is Not Understood

Sorry, I don't quite follow you. Could you just run through that again, please?
Sorry, I don't quite see what you mean. Could you just explain that, please?

Clarifying After the Point Has Been Made

When you were saying/talking about/describing (to us)/dealing with/summing up/
*   showing us/telling us. . .*
You quoted/commented on/made the point that/(may have) said that/spoke on/
*   about/referred to. . .*
Could you tell us /say a bit more about/explain to us what you meant by that/be a
*   little more specific/run us through that again.*

Other Clarification Sequences

What exactly did you mean by. . .?
Could we go back to what you were saying about. . .?
How did you arrive at the figure of. . .?
I think I misunderstood you. Did you say. . .?
You spoke about. . . . Could you explain that in more detail?
Going back to the question of. . . . Can you be more specific?
You didn't mention. . . . Why not?
If I understood you correctly, ... Is that right?
I'm not sure I fully understood. . . . Can you run through/go back to that again, please?
There's one thing I'm not clear about: . . . . Could you go over that again, please?

Getting Information on the Phone

I am calling about/to ask/find out/hear about/in regard to/in connection with . . .
I'd like to ask (about)/find out. . .
Could you tell me . . .?
I wonder if you could tell me/help me . . .
I'd like to talk to somebody about . . . / if someone could help me with . . .

APPENDIX B

Constructions, Formulaic Sequences, and Sentence Stems for Academic Writing

The teaching of grammar constructions and sentence stems can co-occur with supplemental instruction on grammar, vocabulary, and common academic colloca-tions. Using stock sentence stems in academic writing is probably one of the most efficient ways of expanding L2 writers' repertoire of form–meaning combinations and prefabs. Formulaic expressions can be particularly useful when they include variations on their discrete elements (as shown in Appendix A). Commonly occurring sentences, clauses, and phrases can be found in many languages, and these constructions dominate in formal writing.

All of the following sentence stems[1] can be used in teaching and learning a range of grammar constructions, vocabulary, and discourse patterns prevalent in academic and formal prose.

Openings/Introductions

The central issue in xxx is yyy.
The development of xxx is a typical/common problem in xxx.
Xxx and yyy are of particular interest and complexity.
For a long time xxx, it has been the case that yyy.
Most accounts/reports/publications claim/state/maintain that xxx.
According to Smith/recent (media) articles/reports/studies, xxx is/seems to be yyy.
One of the most controversial/important/interesting issues/problems/xxx (recently/in recent literature/media reports) is yyy.
In recent discussions/debates/reports of xxx, a controversial/complex/intertwined issue has been whether xxx. On the one hand, some argue that xxx. On the other hand,

however, others argue that yyy. (modified from Graff and Birkenstein 2015)
It is becoming increasingly difficult/challenging to ignore zzz.
Xxxx plays an important/significant/prominent role in the maintenance/support/
*   dissemination of zzz.*
In the new global/changing/evolving aaa, bbb has become a central/most important/
*   pivotal/persistent issue for ccc.*
Xxx is an increasingly important area/field in ccc.
Xxx and yyy have been an object of research since the 1920s/1960s/1990s
Bbb is a major/vital/central area of interest within the field of zzz.
The issue of xxx has received notable/considerable critical/favorable attention.
Xxx is a classic problem in zzz.
Yyy has been studied by many researchers using/employing/utilizing vvv.

Negative Openings with Countable Nouns

Few reports   *have discussed/examined zzz.*
Few discussions   *have addressed/noted/examined*
Few articles   *have focused on/noted*
Few studies   *have investigated/dealt with*

Thesis/Topic Statements

The purpose of this essay/paper/analysis/overview is to xxx,
*   e.g., take a look at/examine/discuss yyy.*
The main emphasis/focus/goal/purpose of the/this essay/paper/project is to xxx,
*   e.g., is to analyze/provide an overview/discussion of xxx.*

This paper describes and analyzes . . . xxx.
This paper discusses/examines/investigates xxx.
This paper claims/shows that xxx is/is not yyy.
This essay/paper addresses/examines/
*   is designed to/*
*   analyzes/provides an overview of/takes a look at xxx.*
My aim in this paper is to . . .
In this paper, I/we report on/discuss . . .
I intend/will demonstrate/show/explain/illustrate that xxx
My (basic/main/most important) argument/claim is largely/essentially that xxx
The idea/notion/concept/thought/proposition that xxx is yyy is a
*   striking/provocative/thoughtful/promising/thought-provoking one, and this is what*
*   I support/subscribe to/advocate.*

Secondary Purpose

The primary aim/purpose of this paper is xxx. In addition, it examines/discusses . . . yyy
Additionally, yyy is discussed/examined.

A secondary aim of this paper is to yyy.
Another reason/point/issue addressed/discussed in this paper is yyy.

Rhetorical Mode/Discourse Organization Statement

This paper (will) compare(s)/describe/illustrate xxx first
    by analyzing/comparing/demonstrating yyy (that yyy is zzz),
    then by yyying zzz, and finally by yyying aaa).
This paper first analyzes/discusses xxx,
    followed by an examination/illustration/overview of yyy and zzz.
The differences/similarities between xxx and yyy are
    important/pronounced/striking/unmistakable,
                        and they merit/warrant/deserve/call for a
        close/careful/thoughtful/thorough/rigorous
            examination/analysis/scrutiny.
While some differences between aaaaa and bbbbb are
    clear/evident/noticeable/pronounced/unmistakable,
        the similarities are (also) evident/striking/prominent/noticeable/relevant.
The main points/questions/issues addressed/discussed in this essay/paper are: aaa, bbb, and ccc.
This paper begins by ddd. It will then/later go on /move on to xxx.
The first/second/third section of this essay/paper will examine/take a look at/discuss vvv.

Introducing Review of Literature and Evidence from Readings

In recent discussions of xxx,
The issue of zzz is important: [stated reasons]
In recent publications, the topic/issue of xxx has received considerable/prominent attention.
Recently researchers/investigators/scholars have examined the effects of ccc on ddd.
In the past two/three/four decades/twenty/thirty years, a number of researchers/authors have sought/attempted to identify/determine. . . .
Previous/earlier/studies/investigations have reported/noted/determined that. . . .
A considerable/substantial/notable amount of literature has been published on vvv. These studies/reports/investigations have found that . . . .
Surveys/studies/investigations such as that conducted by YYY (2015) showed/demonstrated that . . . .
Recent evidence/findings suggest(s) that . . . .
Several attempts have been made to . . . .
A large body of literature on xxx has been published/made public on zzz.
A number of researchers/investigators have reported that . . . .
Studies of ccc show/demonstrate/emphasize the importance of bbb in/for xxx.

Other Types of Sentence Stems for Essay Development

Assertion

> *It can be claimed/said/assumed that xxx.*
> *It seems certain/likely/doubtful that xxx.*
> *I/we maintain/claim that xxx.*

Agreement with the Author/Source

> *As XXX perceptively/insightfully states/*
> *   correctly notes/*
> *   rightly observes/*
> *   appropriately points out,   xxx is/seems to be yyy* (adjective/noun)

> *I/we rather/somewhat/strongly agree with/support (the idea that) xxx*
> *XXX provides/lends support to YYY's argument/claim/conclusion that zzz*

Disagreement with the Author/Source

> *I/we rather/somewhat/strongly disagree with XXX/that yyy.*
> *As XXX states (somewhat) unclearly/erroneously,*
> *XXX does not support YYY's argument/claim/conclusion about zzz/that zzz*
> *Although XXX contends that yyy, I/we believe that zzz*
> *However, it remains unclear whether . . .*
> *It would (thus) be of interest to learn more about yyy/how . . .*
> *Xxx is mistaken because he/she overlooks/neglects to account for aaa.*
> *I disagree with XXX's view that aaa because, as recent research has shown that. . . .*

Comparison

> *Both xxx and yyy are (quite) similar in that zzz*
> *Xxx is like/resembles yyy*
> *Both xxx and yyy are/seem to be zzz* (adjective/noun)
> *Xxx and yyy have/share some aspects of zzz.*
> *Xxx is similar to/not unlike yyy (with respect to zzz).*

Contrast

> *Xxx is (quite) different from yyy (in regard to zzz).*
> *Xxx is not the case with yyy/the same as yyy.*
> *Xxx does not resemble yyy (in regard to zzz).*
> *Xxx contrasts with yyy (with regard to zzz).*
> *Xxx is unlike yyy in that/with respect to zzz.*

Recommendations

> *Let me recommend/suggest that xxx be/have/do yyy.*
> *What I want/would like to recommend/suggest is that xxx.*
> *One suggestion is/may be that xxx (do yyy).*

Citing Sources/Supporting Arguments, Claims, Conclusions, and Generalizations

> *As proof/evidence/an example (for this), (let me cite/quote xxx)*
> *According to xxx,*
> *As XXX says/claims,*
>
> *XXX provides evidence/support for yyy / that yyy*
> *XXX demonstrates that yyy*
>   *shows evidence for yyy / that yyy*
> *Xxx is an illustration/example of yyy.*

Citing Sources/Referring to External Sources of Knowledge

> *It is/has been (often) asserted/believed/noted that xxx*   *(YYY, 2003)*
> *It is believed that xxx*   *(YYY, 1999)*
> *It is often asserted that xxx*
> *It has been noted that xxx*

Classification

> *Xxx can/may be divided/classified into yyy (and zzz).*
> *Xxx and yyy are categories/divisions of zzz.*
> *There are xxx categories/types/classes of yyy.*

Giving Examples

> *A well-known/prominent/notable/memorable/classic/useful/important*
>   *example of vvv is xxx/can be found in YYY (2015).*

Generalization

> *Overall,*
> *In general,*
> *On the whole,*
> *Generally speaking,*
> *In most cases,*
> *One can generalize that xxx*
>
> *For the most part,*
> *With the exception of xxx,*
> *With one exception,*

Summarizing

Reporting Verbs and Noun Clause Chunks for Summaries (*author first*)

The author goes on to say/state/show that xxx
The author further argues/explains/shows that
The article further states that
(Smith) also states/maintains/argues/asserts that
(Smith) also believes/concludes/feels that
In the second half of the article/report, (Johnson) presents xxx to show/explain that

Sentence Stems and Noun Clause Chunks for Summaries (essay/paper first)

The article/report concludes that
This essay/paper has examined/reviews/given an account of vvv.
                                        the reasons/causes for ccc.
This essay/paper/project has argued/made it clear that vvv is the best/worst bbb to aaa.
This assignment/essay/paper has explained the central/crucial/vital importance of ddd in aaa.
This assignment has investigated . . . .
The present investigation has compared three different yyys in terms of zzz.
This essay/paper has examined the role of ccc in/for ddd.

Closing Statement

In sum/conclusion,
To sum up/conclude,
To tie this (all) together,

Note

1 Based on and Graff and Birkenstein (2014), Hinkel (2015), Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), and Swales and Feak (2012).