A framework for the inclusion of multiword expressions in ELT

Reply to reviewers

Thank you for the constructive comments made regarding the manuscript – they were very useful, and all points were given careful consideration. Please find specific replies to each concern below.

1. Replies Reviewer 1

1.1. Reviewer 1 Comment: "The statement that 'since formulaic language is associated with identity' needs clarification…"

Author Reply: This point is drawn from a lengthy discussion around how formulaic expressions relate to a particular model of fluency in Norman Segalowitz's 'Cognitive Bases of Second Language Fluency' (2010). Here is one relevant excerpt (pp. 128-9): "Languages afford their users particular ways for promoting the interests of the self, including a repertoire of fixed (formulaic) and partially fixed expressions … However, fluency in the L2 will develop only to the extent that the user's motivation succeeds in bringing him or her into contact situations that are appropriate for learning to take place." This, however, is more of a theoretical position than an empirical one, and to make that point clearer the wording in the manuscript has been altered as follows:

Original Wording (p. 1, para. 1): *"Furthermore, Segalowitz (2010: 128) argues that since formulaic language is associated with identity and 'access'…"*

Change in Manuscript: *"Furthermore, Segalowitz (2010: 128) theorizes that since formulaic language is associated with identity and 'access'…"*

1.2. Reviewer 1 Comment: "What is the reason why the authors did not acknowledge or discuss Lewis's lexical approach?"

Author Reply: Indeed, Michael Lewis and his works around the Lexical Approach is still one of the few citable authors when it comes specifically to how to incorporate multiword lexis in ELT. Since the journal (ELT-J) requests that references be kept to a relatively low number, a decision was made to only include references that directly supported key points in the article. Hence, Lewis (in addition to other influential authors in the area phraseology and formulaic language, such as Alison Wray, Michael Hoey, and Norbert Schmitt) were not originally included. However, on reflection, as the Lexical Approach is practically a sine qua non when talking about formulaic language in ELT, a decision was made to include two references from Lewis's (1993) work. This change was added

to the presentation of the problem on page 1, and also when discussing degrees of compositionality, on page 5 (para 1). Below is an excerpt of the new passage:

Change in Manuscript (p. 1, para. 3): *"As pointed out in Lewis (1993), despite the apparent importance and prevalence of multiword expressions, many teachers simply do not attempt to prioritize or organize the multiword lexis in the courses they deliver in any systematic way, preferring instead to deal with such items 'as they arise' (p. 123)…"*

1.3. Reviewer 1 Comment: "Why did the authors choose the British National Corpus and not other more readily available, freely accessible corpora? Suggestions that readers search engines like Google must be stated with caution…"

Author Reply: The British National Corpus was chosen, in part, precisely because it is freely and readily available to the public, not only through the website mentioned in Note 4 of the original manuscript, but also through others which can provide more versatile query options like http://phrasesinenglish.org/ - again, for free. The BNC, along with COCA, was chosen for the purposes of illustration for a variety of additional reasons. First of all, together with COCA (also freely available for corpus queries) and the Bank of English (not publicly available), it is one of the largest language databases in the world, and a longstanding and highly regarded (as well as highly-cited) tool for research and linguistic inquiry. This popularity is due at least in part to the fact that it is one of the few corpora of that size that allows the public to look at the actual primary data (the files themselves). Further, the fact that the BNC has been and is still used in applied linguistic research so extensively (see studies on vocabulary testing, for example), queries carried out on the BNC can be viewed in the light of that research, when relevant. Though the corpus is now somewhat dated, it is still used in research today – particularly vocabulary-related research – because of its sheer size and due to the fact that that size allows researchers to observe patterns that may not be as evident in corpora of more modest sizes. Finally, as the corpus comprises 10 million words of transcribed spoken English (in addition to its 90 million words of written discourse), it is considered more representative of general English than corpora that mostly contain written data.

Nonetheless, the reviewer makes a good point that it may be useful to take the opportunity to point out to the reader that other freely available corpora can also be found, and such guidance has now been added to Note 4 (see below). Moreover, the reviewer is right that a word of warning is in order when it comes to querying Internet search engines, precisely for the reasons mentioned by Reviewer 1 ("…counts can be misleading/inaccurate for multi-counting occurrences with the same material"). For this reason, such caution has also been included in Note 4:

Change in Manuscript (p. 14, Note 4): *"Such searches can fairly easily be carried out using web-based corpus search engines, such as the one freely accessible for the BNC at http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/using/index.xml?ID=simple. For a more extensive list of corpora available to the public, visit http://tiny.cc/corpora. Although using general*

Internet search engines like Google can be informative, it is suggested that linguistically-oriented search engines that provide more contextual information, like the one available for free at www.webcorp.org.uk, be preferred, with the caveat that material retrieved from the Web must always be considered with caution (due to pages that may be repeated, for example).

1.4. Reviewer 1 Comment: "Although the inherent context-specific, user-specific use of the FTF is a strength … one may also question whether the 'guidance' … would lead to any meaningful changes in practicality, because such a decision is necessarily instructor-, learner-, and context-dependent."

Author Reply: Yes, this is a very good point to raise. It would seem that, in the end, it is textbooks (and language tests) from which any positive washback on any meaningful scale might occur. However, coursebooks and tests are also (increasingly) context-dependent. More and more, major coursebook publishers like Macmillan and Pearson are promoting local authors and books tailor-made for specific countries and/or markets. (In fact, the author is working on one such textbook as a collaborator at the time of writing.) Such publications are sensitive to the particular needs of the instructors, learners, and contexts for whom the material is intended, and in such cases (it is hoped) the FTF may be especially effective as a tool.

1.5. Reviewer 1 Comment: "…how does the use of Google, corpus-informed dictionaries, and online corpora help (non-native teachers) with their FTF judgment on the transparency-opaque continuum?"

Author Reply: Ironically, it is the non-native teacher who is perhaps best qualified to make such a judgment. After all, most non-native teachers will be teaching English in their home countries, to students who speak the L1 of that teacher. That teacher most likely knows – arguably even more than most native speakers – which semantic features may be especially tricky for the learners in question. For example, a native-speaker of English might not identify the expression 'a number of' as being opaque, but a non-native, more likely to break down even very common expressions, might notice that 'a + number + of' does not automatically reveal its meaning of 'several', and therefore place it on the FTF in perhaps a more learner-appropriate quadrant. (See also new section in manuscript: 'Fine tuning FTF judgments: transparency'.)

Nonetheless, the Reviewer correctly observes that the original wording in the manuscript implied that tools such as the Internet and dictionaries could not only be consulted by non-natives for frequency information, but also for transparency. This has now been rectified:

Original Wording: *"The same, perhaps, may not apply to the same extent to less proficient non-native teachers of English. It is suggested that, in such cases, tools such as Internet search engines (however, see Note 4), corpus-informed electronic dictionaries and…"*

Change in Manuscript: *"The same, perhaps, may not apply to the same extent to less proficient non-native teachers of English. It is suggested that, at least in terms of frequency, tools such as Internet search engines (however, see Note 4), corpus-informed electronic dictionaries and…"*

1.6. Reviewer 1 Comment: "Figure 4 needs to be clarified for readers who are not familiar with output generated from corpora."

Author Reply: This clarification has now been added (and is now Figure 5).

1.7. Reviewer 1 Comment: "…the practicality in the real world (of using inter-rater reliability) must be considered."

Author Reply: The reviewer is of course correct. The inter-rater option was there as an example of a useful tool, but has now been eliminated, in part due to this comment raised by Reviewer 1, but also in order to allow space to augment another very important point raised by Reviewer 2. (A related discussion around how native speakers rate idiomaticity has been retained, however – see point 2.2 later in this document.)

1.8. Reviewer 1 Comment: " …I think that considering learners' use of the tool would make the ideas presented in this article hold even more promise and have a greater potential impact on bridging theory and practice."

Author Reply: While it is appreciated that the FTF can complement approaches to teaching that encourage Data-Driven Learning to one extent or another, the FTF is designed, primarily, to remedy the issues raised in the Introduction of the article, namely, that 1) teachers and, more importantly, 2) coursebooks don't seem to incorporate multiword expressions in any particularly systematic way. In other words, it is envisaged that textbook authors, developing a new series, might look at the lexis being presented in a given unit and then, mindful that multiword lexis is useful and important, consider such items contained in it (e.g. from a reading text) and choose which ones are particularly important to point out using the FTF as a tool to help inform their choices. (These points have now been made clearer early on in the new revision.)

Nevertheless, this point as raised by Reviewer 1 is a good one to at least mention in the article, since issues such as frequency and transparency are of course important to be at least aware of by learners, and teachers who are using the FTF could (and perhaps

should) make its rationale transparent to learners (who could then possibly incorporate it in the uses the Reviewer mentions). Therefore, some wording has been added to that effect in the closing remarks of the revised manuscript:

Change in Manuscript: *"Indeed, the FTF and its rationale could even be made available to students, who then may avail themselves of it strategically towards autonomous and data-driven learning…"*

2. Replies Reviewer 2

2.1. Reviewer 2 Comment: "… it is not clear whether the framework is suggested as a way to look at the lexis which appears in texts and decide whether or not it is suitable for explicit focus, or as a way to approach the presentation of new lexis to students across a syllabus."

Author Reply: This is a very important point indeed, and in fact has led the author to add a substantial new portion to the beginning of the manuscript with the aim of clarifying these points. (Please see new section entitled 'The current situation' in the revision.)

2.2. Reviewer 2 Comment: "Given the interesting combination of frequency with opacity as determining factors, there is an imbalance given to means of determining frequency, and the attention given to opacity… Evidence of how real raters cope with determining opacity would … add weight to this part of the article. This would be particularly important when considering longer, semi-fixed expressions, and how the notion of opacity might be determined when the expressions do not have a common feature like the examples with 'take' presented in the article."

Author Reply: Again, very good points made here. Partly in order to allow sufficient space to address the important need raised by Reviewer 2 in her/his first comment, and also in part to address a comment raised by Reviewer 1 (see reply 1.7 to Reviewer 1 earlier) regarding the practicality (and therefore, ultimately, pedagogical relevance) of including the rating scale, this has now been omitted. However, the point itself should not be omitted. In order to address Reviewer 2's relevant query regarding the attention to defining opacity and how real raters cope with determining opacity, two new points have been added. One is a brief operationalization of opacity, or 'non-compositionality', borrowed from Grant & Bauer 2004, and now included in the revised article: "Grant and Bauer (2004: 52) suggest that a multiword expression can be classified as completely non-compositional if the meaning of the expression is retained when each lexical word in the expression is replaced with its own definition..". It is hoped that this definition adds some concreteness to the concept for the reader. In addition, and specifically addressing the issue of how real raters 'cope' with judgment of opacity, Stephanie Wulff's (2008) excellent empirical research on precisely this point has been mentioned and summarized to elucidate this point (see revised Discussion section). To further add important

attention to the practical operationalization of opacity judgments, an entirely new section under 'Fine-tuning FTF judgments' has been added, specifically on the point of transparency, suggesting two particular criteria that can be considered especially usable by non-native teachers.

Finally, as suggested by Reviewer 2, a new set of examples beyond 'take' have been included, which also serves to preface the points now further elaborated on in the 'Discussion' section which it immediately precedes.

2.3. Reviewer 2 Comment: "The initial paragraph is a little unspecific … and could be more direct and defined and would benefit from reference to some of the other key figures…"

Author Reply: Both points have now been addressed. Although ELT-J encourages references be kept to a restricted number, the author has managed to include Lewis (who was also suggested by Reviewer 2 – see point 1.2 above. The phrase 'for some years now' essentially becomes redundant through the addition of that reference as scholarship spanning 20 years is shown through the references anyway.

Original Wording (p. 1, para. 1): *"For some years now, bolstered especially by the growing influence of computerized corpora in applied linguistics, several researchers have suggested that multiword expressions (e.g. never mind, by all means, stand up for, in the first place) are pervasive in language, playing an essential role in language acquisition, comprehension, and production (in both L1 and L2), and therefore should be included as a prominent feature in language instruction (Weinert 1995; Meunier and Granger 2008).*

Change in Manuscript: *"Bolstered especially by the growing influence of computerized corpora in applied linguistics, several researchers have suggested that multiword expressions (e.g. never mind, by all means, stand up for, in the first place) are pervasive in language, playing an essential role in language acquisition, comprehension, and production (in both L1 and L2), and therefore should be included as a prominent feature in language instruction (Lewis 1993; Weinert 1995; Meunier and Granger 2008).*

2.4. Reviewer 2 Comment (regarding p. 3, line 23): "This is overly hedged and doesn't add much to the discussion, even with the accompanying footnote."

Author Reply: The overly-hedged sentence has now been deleted for the reasons the Reviewer cited. The footnote remains and has been moved to an earlier sentence.

2.5. Reviewer 2 Comment (regarding p. 3, line 57): "This counterpoint (with respect to the subjectivity and learner-dependence of interpretability of multiword expressions) is also worth brief discussion and referencing."

Author Reply: A full paragraph on this has now been included in the revised manuscript, with an additional reference (on page 3 of the original manuscript).

2.6. Reviewer 2 Comment (regarding p. 7, line 62): "Is there an assumption here that at higher levels other expressions have been learnt successfully?"

Author Reply: No, the original manuscript states that "students at much higher levels might best benefit from items more towards quadrant 3…" – the key words there are 'much higher' and 'might'. This of course all depends on how one has ultimately defined frequency, and the source material. If, for example, items in quadrant 1 have a frequency that match the top 1,000 most frequent words in general English, then it's likely that students at 'much higher levels' – say, for example, CEFR C1 and C2 – can be assumed to know general English expressions matching that frequency (e.g. *in order to*, *as well as*, *have got to*, etc.). On the other hand, if the frequency has been set to a lower threshold, and the source corpus is more domain-specific (e.g. engineering), then that assumption probably should not be made at all. Nevertheless, in an attempt to make this point a bit clearer, the wording has been altered in the sentence in question:

Original Wording: *"Students at much higher levels might best benefit from items more towards quadrant 3 (relatively infrequent and opaque)."*

Change in Manuscript: *"Students at very advanced levels could possibly benefit more from items more towards quadrant 3 (relatively infrequent and opaque)."*

2.7. Reviewer 2 Comment (regarding p. 8, line 17): "Does 'good sense' here relate to 'usefulness' earlier?"

Author Reply: The point here is that corpus evidence should always be considered in light of what makes sense to the teacher and the needs of the students. It does not mean that experience should trump evidence, but that one should complement the other. The wording has been altered to add some clarity in the new revision:

Original Wording: *"Corpus evidence should always be tempered by good sense, especially when that sense is informed by years of practice."*

Change in Manuscript: *"Corpus evidence should always be tempered by good sense (i.e. what makes sense in light of what the teacher knows about the learners' needs), especially when that sense is informed by years of practice."*