BOOK REVIEW

Formulaic language and second language speech fluency: Background, evidence, and classroom applications

D. Wood (2010). London/New York: Continuum. Pp. 242, CAD$39.95 (paper).

Wood's (2010) *Formulaic language and second language speech fluency* provides theoretical and practical accounts of speech fluency and pedagogical applications of formulaic sequences within classroom contexts. The book is divided into three parts including background, evidence, and applications. Through reviewing the commonly-cited literature, and with particular emphasis on longitudinal studies, the background section initially presents the reader with definition of fluency, associating it with temporal variables of rate (speech and articulation rates), quantity (mean length of runs), and pausing (silent/filled, locations, and length) as well as repair phenomena.

The focus then shifts to formulaic language in general, elaborating on the ways formulaic sequences are manipulated by first and second language speakers to produce fluent speech. The author presents a clear-cut definition of formulaic language and then surveys the literature to provide a solid understanding of the concept from other scholars' perspectives. The discussion is then linked to the notions of types, characteristics, and the value of formulaic sequences as well as the diagnostic criteria proposed in the literature. Children and adult language acquisitions are contrasted, stressing the facilitative role of formulaic language in language acquisition. The chapter finally highlights the pragmatic functions of memorized sequences as an important building block of speech fluency.

Wood next places a considerable emphasis upon the key role played by cognitive and mental processes in speech production and enhancement of speech fluency. Through reviewing a large body of literature on the cognitive and psycholinguistic models of speech production, he attempts to deepen the readers' understanding of the cognitive processes underlying speech production and fluency. Wood provides an extended account of the fluency-related phenomena involving such concepts as short-term/long-term/working memory, automatization, proceduralization, controlled and automatic processing, and concludes by describing how these cognitive processes are facilitated through the use of formulaic sequences.

The last chapter of the background deals with the social and cultural perspectives on fluency. Despite the limited literature linking the concepts of fluency and formulaic language to sociocultural factors, the author is able to demonstrate the inherent dynamics that exist among a range of personality factors including anxiety, self-efficacy, voice, and identity and how these may interact with the development of fluency and the use of formulaic language.

Adopting a socio-historical and sociolinguistic view, he conceptualizes L2 fluency and formulaic language as influenced by a myriad of contextual factors, which exert an impact on the ways and extent to which formulaic sequences are used.

The second section, evidence, sets out to establish a link between the theory discussed hitherto and the empirical implications in practice. Wood reports on a longitudinal study of formulaic language development through the course of a project and its influences upon fluency gains of ESL students. Employing a repeated measures design and performing extensive qualitative as well as quantitative analyses, he attempts to demonstrate in practice how cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural factors interact and how speech fluency is facilitated through the use of formulaic sequences. He notes, towards the end, that the effect is complex and shifting, and puts forward constructive suggestions for further research.

The final chapter concludes the discussion of theories and research contributions in classroom setting. Wood aims to establish a solid understanding of the construct of fluency, the role of formulaic sequences, and classroom techniques and strategies that improve them. Drawing on literature and research, he makes a convincing argument for the phases of fluency development through formulaic sequences and ends the discussion by distinguishing formulaic language as the key factor in automatizing speech fluency.

Content organization and depth of discussions through the entire book, particularly in the background section, are two of the distinctive features characterizing this book. However, despite the author's attempts to examine complex subject matters through simple and straight-forward language, some of the discussions in the background section (e.g. cognitive processing) could be hard to grasp for readers who lack prior knowledge of the field. While the book provides a concise and substantial collection of the literature benefiting researchers in the field, it could get overwhelming at times to novice researchers, or language teachers merely seeking immediate practical solutions to address classroom challenges of enhancing L2 learners' speech fluency.

The book would have benefited from a section on fluency assessment; both qualitative and quantitative. Though the temporal measures of speech commonly used in quantitative measurement of the construct have been thoroughly discussed in the background, a more systematic and practical guide to the ways temporal features of speech could be used to inform fluency research and classroom practice, as well as some discussion of qualitative evaluation of oral fluency (e.g. rubrics and holistic/analytic scales), would have improved the comprehensiveness of the content from an assessment viewpoint.

Despite the above comments, this evidence-based book not only offers theoretical insights for academics interested in researching speech fluency and formulaic language, but also puts forward clear and comprehensive discussions, making it an interesting read for new SLA (second language acquisition) and L2 fluency researchers. Last but not least, the pedagogical implications and thorough discussions of hands-on L2 speech fluency