

AAAL 2009

March 24, Denver, CO

Ute Römer &
Stefanie Wulff

Colloquium on:
"SLA and the inseparability
of vocabulary and syntax"



1. Introduction

SLA and vocabulary–
syntax inseparability

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- corpus studies have provided massive evidence for the interdependence of vocabulary and syntax
- research based on large amounts of authentic language (including CogLing, Ig. acquisition, CorpLing) shows that two areas that have traditionally been kept apart (in linguistic theory and language pedagogy) are in fact inseparable
- probably THE major finding of modern corpus linguistic research over the past 40 years:
Language is highly patterned.



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Language patterning

- language is made up to a high degree of semi-fixed units
- vocabulary items prefer to occur in certain syntactic structures
- syntactic structures attract certain vocabulary items
- the interaction between vocabulary and syntax is systematic (cf. e.g. Goldberg 2006, Hunston/Francis 2000, Römer 2005, Sinclair 1991, Stubbs 1996)



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An example of language patterning

it would be * to	101	10
it would be interesting to	44	
it would be useful to	14	
it would be nice to	11	
it would be better to	9	
it would be possible to	5	
it would be helpful to	5	
it would be fair to	4	
it would be difficult to	3	
it would be necessary to	3	(example from Römer forthc. c)
it would be good to	3	

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Central research strands/theories

- Idiom Principle (John Sinclair)
- Pattern Grammar (Susan Hunston & Gill Francis)
- Lexical Priming (Michael Hoey)
- Lexical Bundles research (Douglas Biber et al.)
- Collostructional Analysis (Stefan T. Gries & Anatol Stefanowitsch)
- Construction Grammar (Adele Goldberg)

(cf. overview in Römer forthcoming a)



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Observations common to all these approaches...

- the study of language is empirical and based on large amounts of naturally occurring text
- it is impossible to divorce vocabulary items and syntactic constructions
- form and meaning are inseparable
- the unit of meaning in language is not an isolated word but a construction/phrasal unit (different levels of complexity)



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- many different labels for phrasal units or multiword form–meaning pairs:
formulas, constructions, n–grams, phrase–frames, lexical bundles, phraseologisms, phraseological items, routines, patterns, prefabs, multiword units...
- these units are not only characteristic of L1 /NS speech and writing but also occur in learner language (cf. Gries/Wulff 2005, Goldberg 2006, Römer forthcoming b)
- still: vocabulary–syntax integration not yet systematically picked up in AppLing & SLA research and pedagogical practice (vocab & grammar taught and assessed separately)



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This colloquium...

- aims to address important issues related to vocabulary–syntax inseparability and SLA research & practice

- targets the following questions:

What empirical evidence can be obtained for phraseological patterns in learner language?

What are the implications of a phraseological approach to language for a) language teaching, b) language assessment, c) a model of SLA?



2. The presentations

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1. "Constructions and chunks in learner language: Experimental and corpus–linguistic evidence" (Stefanie Wulff & Stefan T. Gries)
2. "What are the pedagogical implications of a phraseological approach to language?" (Fanny Meunier)
3. "Measuring the formulaicity of language" (Nick C. Ellis, Matthew Brook O'Donnell, Ute Römer, Stefan T. Gries & Stefanie Wulff)

SHORT BREAK



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SHORT BREAK

4. "Lexico–constructional variability, task demands and assessment of second language spoken performance" (Peter Robinson & Daisuke Nakamura)
5. "Formulaic language: What language models must explain" (Norbert Schmitt)
6. Discussion (Randi Reppen)

OPEN DISCUSSION

(timeline on handout)



References

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