

Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching by James R. Nattinger and Jeanette S. DeCarrico. Oxford University Press, 1992. xiii + 218 pp.

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Studies from various traditions of natural language research into socially institutionalized, and thereby lexicalized, phraseology (i.e., lexical-grammatical collocations) have been of increasing interest to some applied linguists. Such phraseology ranges from fixed expressions (idioms) with high semantic opacity (noncompositionality) and high structural invariability to relatively variable and transparent expressions. The theoretical background to the 'lexical phrases' (LPs) referred to in the title of Nattinger & DeCarrico's recent book, *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching*, is introduced in their very useful and fairly complete literature survey of Chapter 1. 'Lexical phrases' are held by the authors to be locatable along a "form/function" continuum (Chapter 1) of expressions, which they analyze according to the following criteria: 'canonical' *versus* 'non-canonical shape' (having one of the "typical shapes of English structures"), idiomaticity, as defined above, and pragmatic illocutionary (speech act) or cohesive discourse function.

The authors then present some classification lists,¹ their categories culled from various sources: a "functional" (speech act) list and a "[text-]organizational" (i.e., metalanguage, *cf.* Vande Kopple, 1989) list. Unfortunately, it is not made clear how these schemes might relate systematically to constitute LPs in support of the authors' implicit, unsubstantiated claim that the form and function continua are somehow parallel, inseparable, or identical. The authors then propose a catalog of LPs in Chapter 2 derived from these schemes. This catalog contains a mixture of formal and functional classifications, which, it is claimed, move from 'frozen' toward "freely compositional and productive" (p. 178) utterances: "polywords" such as *once and for all* (a "summarizer" in this case), "institutionalized expressions" such as *nice meeting you*, "phrasal

constraints" such as *for* ____ (an "exemplifier," as in *for instance*), and "sentence builders" such as *let me start by/with X* (a "topic marker").

The authors go on to discuss, in both theoretical and practical terms, pedagogical applications according to language skill in Chapters 5 through 7 (this will be returned to later in this review). In Chapter 8 the authors address the need for further theoretical and analytic study of LPs. The scope of the research enterprise which they call for involves the coordination of the several fields that contribute to our understanding of 'lexical phrases': linguistics, discourse analysis, lexicology, language acquisition, and language teaching.

In light of the relative poverty of current knowledge and the problems and scope of the sorts of research still needed--as presented by the authors themselves (Chapters 1 & 8), it is somewhat disturbing to this reviewer that so much of the *what* and *why* sandwiched between the first and last chapters is presented with such definitiveness. The LP compendia and their proposed applications (Chapters 2 - 7) rely upon an incomplete, oversimplistic analytic framework which appears to be an *ad hoc* cross-classification of intuited, and roughly sketched collocational forms with notional judgments of their stereotypic 'speech act functions.' Yet Chapter 1, and especially Chapter 8, suggest that a complete and sufficiently delicate analytic framework is not yet extant.

My primary criticism, then, is that the reader will not find much immediately practicable direction toward these crucial levels of analysis in *Lexical Phrases*. The book nevertheless constitutes a valuable introduction and calls for further research. The authors succeed reasonably well at these goals, and I applaud them for it for the following reason.

Linguists have focused on analyzing language data either according to a notional-functional model of language or according to a structural-generative one--to the neglect of conventionalized phraseology which can be *both* lexicalized *and* syntactically variable. The problem for applied linguists has been that these epistemologically motivated interpretations from grammar, and of syntactic rules from lexical lists, preclude adequate accounts of the daily output of natural language by real, as opposed to 'ideal,' speakers in a discourse community. As noted by Pawley & Syder:

Native speakers produce coherent strings of cohesive language. This discourse is nativelike, as opposed to possible grammatical alternatives which are not. The explanation for these facts has been largely overlooked by grammarians (1983, p. 191).

Comprehensive studies of phraseology, from invariant, idiomatic formulae to highly flexible lexical-syntactic collocations, would require a synthesis of structural and functional perspectives, just as natural language in use is a social and psychological synthesis of linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. Applied linguistics research is largely devoid of studies in this area of inquiry. But this situation is changing: practical interest in the interface of lexicon and syntax in language use has slowly increased over the past few decades.² Nattinger & DeCarrico's *Lexical Phrases* (not their first investigation into this area) can only help to accelerate the process.

Nattinger & DeCarrico themselves clearly recognize the cumbersome nature of their enterprise, and are at pains to point out the need for fundamental work on prefabricated language of various types. The authors are aware of the wide-ranging demands of their investigation: in Part One of the book (Chapters 1-4) they informatively relate LPs to most of the relevant literature (in cognitive psychology, language acquisition, discourse analysis, lexicography, text-analysis, second language learning, and so on). They have also done primary research of their own, presenting their notional-functional (speech act) classification of types of LPs in English (although this reviewer's caveats, as discussed previously, still apply). They also provide examples from Chinese, Russian, and Spanish in an appendix despite the fact that these suffer from the same classificatory and methodological murkiness of their presentation of English expressions.

Part Two of *Lexical Phrases* (Chapters 5-8) is a thought-provoking introduction to the potential applications of LPs to second-language pedagogy. The authors provide useful suggestions for incorporating LPs into the curriculum both in terms of spoken discourse (many of which hark back to the venerable notional-functional approach) and writing and reading (not as well-covered). Importantly, the authors discourage the conventional wisdom that spoken language is more predictable than written and attempt to show the relationship of LPs to the production and processing of

written text types from both sentence-level (micro) and various larger-text (macro) perspectives. Unfortunately, they do not clarify the relation of written LPs to their analytical classifications. I suspect that their repeated calls for further research are well-founded if the incongruities between metadiscourse and purely informational LPs are to be untangled. Overall, however, the second part of the book constitutes an enthusiastic call for classroom experimentation and a convincing argument that a knowledge of LPs is crucial to native-like fluency.

My main criticisms of *Lexical Phrases* have to do with not being told in sufficient detail about Nattinger and DeCarrico's own procedures for finding and classifying LPs as opposed to those of the many other researchers whose work they canvass. What is their observational methodology? Introspection and intuition? What is their overall form/function theoretical premise, that LPs of all types are lexicalized directly according to their conventionalized illocutionary force or cohesive effect or coherence marking across texts? From what I can infer, this is the (teleological) case. In searching for and recognizing LPs, the authors recommend a quantitative method used in collocational studies (pp. 21-22), but apparently it is not used by the authors themselves. They include an appendix listing LPs used in Chinese, Russian, and Spanish which were obtained by consulting native speakers (acknowledged on p. xii), so their assumption seems to be that LPs can be adequately inventoried via native speaker intuition. It is not convincing to operate *a priori* on the premise that a representative sample of LPs is accessible at a conscious level, and that once slapped with notional-functional 'speech act' labels and given minimal structural description.

The variability in the processing and production of formulaic speech suggests issues not accounted for by speech act theory. One essential implication is noted, then ignored, by the authors: that prefabricated language occurs ubiquitously in language use, and it is by no means necessarily motivated by the demands of ritualized social interaction.

Other functions may well suffice to account for the conventionality of LPs, most of which the authors mention in their theoretical discussion but which they fail to include in their analysis and classification of the data: providing social indexicality (signs of the speaker's membership in a discourse community and acceptance

of a group's epistemology/ideology, cf. Bolinger, 1976), increasing cognitive processing efficiency in memory retrieval and production--crucial to language acquisition and fluency (Peters, 1977), and in the case of oral narrative, matching metrical cadences with recurrent topical material (Parry, 1971; Kiparsky, 1987).

As Nattinger and DeCarrico point out, the use of formulaic speech is not a language learning 'strategy' which is abandoned once language 'chunks' have been tested and analyzed; rather, it is an essential component of both fluent reception and production. Arguments for the fundamental importance of collocational knowledge (both declarative and procedural) and collocational processing have been advanced by corpus analysts such as Sinclair (1991), whose speculations concerning the continuous interaction of the 'idiom principle' (corresponding to lexicalized collocations) and the 'open choice principle' (corresponding to unique collocations) should have been considered in *Lexical Phrases*.

How--and the extent to which--formulaic or prefabricated speech plays a role in any or all text types, in language acquisition and performance, and for that matter, in verbal cognition, is a question which will no doubt enjoy the attentions of a growing number of researchers. *Lexical Phrases* provides a valuable and wide-ranging, if somewhat inchoate, introduction to this arena of inquiry.

NOTES

¹ I hesitate to call these taxonomies since they are in not systematic. They are, rather, conjoined lists, partonomies, which are perhaps presumed to cross-cut each other in ways which remain to be explored.

² By way of introduction to 'lexical phrases', in addition to the book under review, I recommend Pawley & Syder (1983), Peters (1977), and Bolinger (1976).

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