

Formulaic Language

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May 3, 2019

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- (5) She's a real character. In fact she's larger than
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Formulaic language is “chunk-like”

It “rolls off our tongue”

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Formulaic language is “chunk-like”

It “rolls off our tongue”

It sounds as if it has been stored **as a whole**

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What is formulaic language?

Formulaic language is “chunk-like”

It “rolls off our tongue”

It sounds as if it has been stored **as a whole**

It is relatively resistant to manipulation, e.g. **for shouting out loud*

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Words which are very likely to co-occur in the same fragment of text - often **next to each other**

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They exist in a

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Words which are very likely to co-occur in the same fragment of text - often **next to each other**

They exist in a **syntagmatic** relationship.

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(9) That's a weak / feeble excuse

(10) That's a powerful / strong cup of tea

(11) That's a powerful / strong argument

(12) That's a powerful / strong claim

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(14) He's a serious / keen sportsman

(15) She has high / tall hopes

(16) He told a high / tall story

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- (17) He did / made a decision
- (18) Could you do / make me a favour
- (19) She's a stern boss who brooks / suffers no dissent
- (20) She's a stern boss who doesn't brook / suffer fools gladly

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Two word Adj + N or V + N collocations

Multi-word chunks, e.g.

down in the dumps

larger than life

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Two word Adj + N or V + N collocations

Multi-word chunks, e.g.

down in the dumps

larger than life

Some may contain an “open” slot, e.g.

X read Y the riot act \Rightarrow

Jason read Angela the riot act.

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Two word Adj + N or V + N collocations

Multi-word chunks, e.g.

down in the dumps

larger than life

Some may contain an “open” slot, e.g.

X read Y the riot act \Rightarrow

Jason read Angela the riot act.

Others may be entire sentences, e.g.

That's no way to behave

I couldn't agree more.

What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this

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Roughly speaking if two words exist in a collocation, then their chances of co-occurring within a multi-word fragment, are greater than would be predicted from their individual frequencies.

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$$\log \left(\frac{p(x,y)}{p(x) p(y)} \right)$$

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- (21) Could that report be any longer?
Could NOUN PHR. be any COMP. ADJ. ?
(= Formulaic sarcastic expression commenting on length of report)
- (22) Could that report be any **longer**?
(= genuine request for report to be longer)

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- (21) Could that report **be** any longer?
Could NOUN PHR. **be** any COMP. ADJ. ?
(= Formulaic sarcastic expression commenting on length of report)
- (22) Could that report be any **longer**?
(= genuine request for report to be longer)
- (23) They're **rolling** in money
(= Formulaic phrase expressing the fact that they are rich)
- (24) They're rolling in **money**
(= Non-formulaic observation that they are currently rolling in a pile of money)

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Phonological reduction = omission / combination of sounds

(25) What do you want to do?
'wa dʒ ə wən ə 'dʊ:

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Phonological reduction = omission / combination of sounds

(25) What do you want to do?
'wa dʒ ə wən ə 'dʊ:

(26) Do yetis have big feet?
*dʒetɪs həv bɪɡ fi:t

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(27) I'd like some fish and chips
aɪd laɪk səm fɪʃ n tʃɪps

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skwi:t (Californian English)

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Phonological reduction = omission / combination of sounds

(28) What do you want to do?
'wat dʒ ə wən ə 'dʊ:

(29) Do yetis have big feet?
*dʒetɪs həv bɪg fi:t

(30) I'd like some fish and chips
aɪd laɪk səm fɪʃ n tʃɪps

skwɪ:t (Californian English)

Lets go (w) eat

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Why does phonological reduction happen?

There is a natural tendency towards phonological reduction

⇒ greater speed efficiency

e.g. lexical reductions; advert → ad, crocodile → croc

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Why does phonological reduction happen?

There is a natural tendency towards phonological reduction

⇒ greater speed efficiency

e.g. lexical reductions; advert → ad, crocodile → croc

But...

Speed/Efficiency ⇐ ⇒ Intelligibility

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Idioms are formulaic expressions with **non-compositional** or **unpredictable** semantics

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Idioms are formulaic expressions with **non-compositional** or **unpredictable** semantics

The meaning is not predictable from the form

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Idioms are formulaic expressions with **non-compositional** or **unpredictable** semantics

The meaning is not predictable from the form

My elderly grandmother kicked the bucket last year

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Idioms are formulaic expressions with **non-compositional** or **unpredictable** semantics

The meaning is not predictable from the form

My elderly grandmother kicked the bucket last year

Pose a lot of difficulty for L2 speakers of English

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English has many idiomatic multi-word verbs called **phrasal verbs**;

(31) He was in a bad mood, so he took it out on his wife

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English has many idiomatic multi-word verbs called **phrasal verbs**;

(31) He was in a bad mood, so he took it out on his wife

(32) I can't put up with all your nagging

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English has many idiomatic multi-word verbs called **phrasal verbs**;

(31) He was in a bad mood, so he took it out on his wife

(32) I can't put up with all your nagging

(33) I'll take you up on that!

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English has many idiomatic multi-word verbs called **phrasal verbs**;

(31) He was in a bad mood, so he took it out on his wife

(32) I can't put up with all your nagging

(33) I'll take you up on that!

(34) He takes after his father

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(35) She pulled off a first in the exam (idiomatic)

(36) Batman pulled off the villain's mask (literal)

****EXERCISE****

Paraphrase the following sentences using phrasal verbs. How idiomatic are they?

- ▶ The vet euthanased our cat
- ▶ Edward VIII relinquished his claim to the throne
- ▶ The company took control of its nearest rival
- ▶ He arranged accommodation for the visiting speaker
- ▶ When she regained consciousness she found she had been tied to the chair

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****EXERCISE****

Paraphrase the following sentences using phrasal verbs;

- ▶ The vet euthanased our cat (... put down our cat)
- ▶ Edward VIII relinquished his claim to the throne
- ▶ The company took control of its nearest rival
- ▶ He arranged accommodation for the visiting speaker
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Paraphrase the following sentences using phrasal verbs;

- ▶ The vet euthanased our cat (... put down our cat)
- ▶ Edward VIII relinquished his claim to the throne (... gave up his claim)
- ▶ The company took control of its nearest rival
- ▶ He arranged accommodation for the visiting speaker
- ▶ When she regained consciousness she found she had been tied to the chair

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Paraphrase the following sentences using phrasal verbs;

- ▶ The vet euthanased our cat (... put down our cat)
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- ▶ The company took control of its nearest rival (... took over the company)
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- ▶ The company took control of its nearest rival (... took over the company)
- ▶ He arranged accommodation for the visiting speaker (... sorted out the accommodation)
- ▶ When she regained consciousness she found she had been tied to the chair (When she came to...)

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She spilt the beans (she told the secret) ⇒

He grasped the nettle (she took on a challenge) ⇒

He kicked the bucket (he died) ⇒

For crying out loud, be quiet! (to register disgust)

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Properties of idioms

She spilt the beans (she told the secret) \Rightarrow

*She **upset** the beans (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

He grasped the nettle (she took on a challenge) \Rightarrow

?She **grabbed** the nettle (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

He kicked the bucket (he died) \Rightarrow

*He **knocked over** the bucket (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

For crying out loud, be quiet! (to register disgust)

*For **shouting** out loud... (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

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Properties of idioms

She spilt the beans (she told the secret) \Rightarrow

*She **upset** the beans (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

?She spilt the **secret** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

He grasped the nettle (she took on a challenge) \Rightarrow

?She **grabbed** the nettle (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*She grasped the **cactus** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

He kicked the bucket (he died) \Rightarrow

*He **knocked over** the bucket (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*He kicked **the pale** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

For crying out loud, be quiet! (to register disgust)

*For **shouting** out loud... (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

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She spilt the beans (she told the secret) ⇒

*She **upset** the beans (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

?She spilt the **secret** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

She **clumsily** spilt the beans (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

He grasped the nettle (she took on a challenge) ⇒

?She **grabbed** the nettle (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*She grasped the **cactus** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

She **boldly** grasped the nettle (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

He kicked the bucket (he died) ⇒

*He **knocked over** the bucket (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*He kicked **the pale** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

*He **slowly** kicked the bucket (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

For crying out loud, be quiet! (to register disgust)

*For **shouting** out loud... (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*For crying out **really** loud... (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

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She spilt the beans (she told the secret) ⇒

*She **upset** the beans (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

?She spilt the **secret** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

She **clumsily** spilt the beans (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

??A lot of beans were spilt at the family reunion
(PASSIVISATION)

He grasped the nettle (she took on a challenge) ⇒

?She **grabbed** the nettle (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*She grasped the **cactus** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

She **boldly** grasped the nettle (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

??At the business meeting the nettle was grasped
(PASSIVISATION)

He kicked the bucket (he died) ⇒

*He **knocked over** the bucket (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*He kicked the **pale** (NOUN SUBSTITUTION)

*He **slowly** kicked the bucket (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

*The bucket was kicked by my grandmother (PASSIVISATION)

For crying out loud, be quiet! (to register disgust)

*For **shouting** out loud... (VERB SUBSTITUTION)

*For crying out **really** loud... (ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION)

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****EXERCISE****

Identify the formulaic expressions below. To what extent are they idiomatic? To what extent do they allow for lexical / syntactic modification?

- ▶ With the best will in the world, I don't think he's suitable for the job
- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential and really needs to pull her socks up
- ▶ Well, look who's talking!
- ▶ What's this jacket doing in my wardrobe? It's not mine!
- ▶ Not in a million years would I ever consider going out with him!

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****EXERCISE****

Identify the formulaic expressions below. To what extent are they idiomatic?

- ▶ With the best will in the world
(NOT VERY IDIOMATIC)
I don't think he's suitable for the job

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****EXERCISE****

Identify the formulaic expressions below. To what extent are they idiomatic?

- ▶ With the best will in the world
(NOT VERY IDIOMATIC)
I don't think he's suitable for the job
- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential
(NOT AT ALL IDIOMATIC) and really needs to
pull her socks up (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)

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- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential
(NOT AT ALL IDIOMATIC) and really needs to
pull her socks up (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ Well, look who's talking! (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)

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I don't think he's suitable for the job
- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential
(NOT AT ALL IDIOMATIC) and really needs to
pull her socks up (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ Well, look who's talking! (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ What's this jacket doing in my wardrobe?
(EXTREMELY IDIOMATIC) It's not mine!

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- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential
(NOT AT ALL IDIOMATIC) and really needs to
pull her socks up (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ Well, look who's talking! (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ What's this jacket doing in my wardrobe?
(EXTREMELY IDIOMATIC) It's not mine!
This is whole-sentence idiom with open slots;
What's X doing + PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE?

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I don't think he's suitable for the job
- ▶ Jennifer is not reaching her potential
(NOT AT ALL IDIOMATIC) and really needs to
pull her socks up (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ Well, look who's talking! (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC)
- ▶ What's this jacket doing in my wardrobe?
(EXTREMELY IDIOMATIC) It's not mine!
This is whole-sentence idiom with open slots;
What's X doing + PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE?
- ▶ Not in a million years (FAIRLY IDIOMATIC) would I
ever consider going out (SLIGHTLY IDIOMATIC) with
him!

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Sentence fragments such as Verb + Noun, e.g. *kick the bucket*

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Sentence fragments such as Verb + Noun, e.g. *kick the bucket*

Multi-word adverbials, e.g. *For crying out loud*, *could you keep that noise down!?*

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Sentence fragments such as Verb + Noun, e.g. *kick the bucket*

Multi-word adverbials, e.g. *For crying out loud, could you keep that noise down!?*

Whole sentence chunks, e.g. *You can't have your cake and eat it*

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Sentence fragments such as Verb + Noun, e.g. *kick the bucket*

Multi-word adverbials, e.g. *For crying out loud*, *could you keep that noise down!?*

Whole sentence chunks, e.g. *You can't have your cake and eat it*

Some idioms have gaps for arguments

- X kicked the bucket
- X read Y the riot act

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Constructional idioms

= large-scale idioms with open slots (shown in CAPITALS)

(37) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(38) ?Tamsin studied the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(39) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(40) ?Jake cleaned the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

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Constructional idioms

= large-scale idioms with open slots (shown in CAPITALS)

(37) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(38) ?Tamsin studied the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

**Action / event seems of short duration, i.e.
time flies**

(39) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(40) ?Jake cleaned the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

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= large-scale idioms with open slots (shown in CAPITALS)

(37) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

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SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

**Action / event seems of short duration, i.e.
time flies**

(39) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

(40) ?Jake cleaned the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

Time is wasted

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(41) Camilla networked her way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
to the top
LOCATION

(42) ?Camilla nail-painted her way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
to the top
LOCATION

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Nick Riches

(41) Camilla networked her way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
to the top
LOCATION

(42) ?Camilla nail-painted her way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
to the top
LOCATION
Networking action creates movement to the top

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(43) The old man limped his way
 SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
 out of the bar
 LOCATION

(44) ?The old man walked his way
 SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
 out of the bar
 LOCATION

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Nick Riches

(43) The old man limped his way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
out of the bar
LOCATION

(44) ?The old man walked his way
SUBJECT VERB POSS. DET. way
out of the bar
LOCATION
**Action creates movement. Effort involved.
Movement is roundabout.**

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(45) The more I see of humanity, the more
The more CLAUSE, *the more*
I love my dog
CLAUSE

(46) ??The more you touch that cable, the more
The more CLAUSE, *the more*
you will die
CLAUSE

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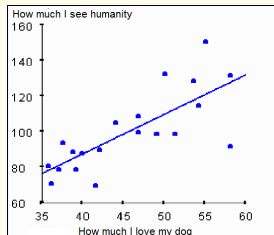
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Constructional idioms

(45) The more I see of humanity, the more
The more **CLAUSE**, *the more*
I love my dog
CLAUSE

(46) ??The more you touch that cable, the more
The more **CLAUSE**, *the more*
you will die
CLAUSE

There is a direct CORRELATION between two events



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Characteristics of constructional idioms

- ▶ Display syntactic properties
 - ▶ Large - can span a whole sentence
 - ▶ Open slots (e.g. for arguments)
 - ▶ Ability to manipulate tense / aspect, e.g. *she's dancing the night way*
- ▶ Non-compositional semantics

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(47) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

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(47) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*
Intransitive *dance* takes direct object *night*.

(48) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*

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(47) Tamsin danced the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*
Intransitive *dance* takes direct object *night*.

(48) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*
Intransitive *X-boxed* takes direct object *weekend*

(49) The more I see of humanity, the more
The more CLAUSE, *the more*
I love my dog
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Intransitive *dance* takes direct object *night*.

(48) Jake X-boxed the weekend away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN *away*
Intransitive *X-boxed* takes direct object *weekend*

(49) The more I see of humanity, the more
The more CLAUSE, *the more*
I love my dog
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We have two determiners in a row; *the more*

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Phonological reduction \Rightarrow faster processing

In comprehension, high-frequency chunks are also more quickly comprehended

Arnon, I., & Snider, N. (2010). More than words: Frequency effects for multi-word phrases. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 62, 67-82.

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Chomskyan approach:

- **Syntax** deals with abstract symbols and very general meanings

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Essentially words are idioms

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Constructional idioms pose difficulties for this neat division

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- (50) Tamsin is dancing the night away
SUBJECT VERB DET. NOUN away
**Action / event seems of short duration, i.e.
time flies**

- A range of possible open-class words, in common with abstract syntactic constructions (e.g. SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT)
- We can also manipulate tense and aspect, e.g. progressive is used above

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SO WHERE DO THEY BELONG? ...

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Chomksyan Syntax

- ▶ A strict division is required between syntax and the lexicon
- ▶ Syntax = structural rules / the lexicon = idiosyncratic/arbitrary information
- ▶ Syntax thought to have an innate component
- ▶ Sentence structure looks like a tree

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Construction grammar

- ▶ No strict division between syntax and the lexicon
- ▶ Constructional idioms are genuinely intermediate
- ▶ There is no innate linguistic knowledge
- ▶ Knowledge of language consists of knowledge of "constructions"
- ▶ These can be abstract (e.g. Subject-Verb-Object), but are often very idiosyncratic, e.g. the 'way' construction

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Nick Riches

To what extent do clinical populations depend on formulaic utterances?

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Williams Syndrome?

Specific Language Impairment?

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Without the rule-based system, language would be limited in repertoire, clichéd, and, whilst suitable for certain types of interaction, lacking imagination and novelty. In contrast, with **only** a rule-based system, language would sound pedantic, unidiomatic and pedestrian. (Wray, 1998:64)

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