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Impact of Formulaic Language on Vocabulary Acquisition in Bilingual Students in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Formulaic language plays an important role in reducing cognitive load, improving fluency, and enhancing vocabulary retention. This study investigates the impact of formulaic language on vocabulary acquisition, retention, and usage among Yoruba-English bilingual students in Lagos State, Nigeria. Despite its significance, limited research exists on its impact in bilingual contexts, particularly in socioeconomically diverse settings like Lagos. Using a quantitative research design, 100 participants from low-cost private schools and government-funded public schools were exposed to 30 formulaic expressions over three weeks. Vocabulary retention and usage were assessed through pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed tests. Findings reveal that exposure to formulaic expressions significantly improved vocabulary retention in both groups, with low-cost private school students outperforming their public-school counterparts. Retention remained high (over 85%) in both groups during the delayed test phase, underscoring the effectiveness of formulaic language in long-term memory. However, the ability to use formulaic expressions in speaking and writing tasks lagged behind retention scores, particularly among public-school students. This highlights the need for more interactional practice during instruction. The study also examined the influence of cultural and contextual peculiarities on the comprehension and application of formulaic expressions. Results indicate that students with access to higher-quality instruction and culturally contextualised materials demonstrated better pragmatic competence and contextual appropriateness. These findings emphasize the role of formulaic language in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Therefore, this research highlights the need for bilingual learners to receive explicit instruction in formulaic language.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, formulaic language, vocabulary, multilingualism, retention.

Introduction

Formulaic expressions serve as pre-built pieces that reduce cognitive load during communication. Meanwhile, Rafieyan (2018) argues that formulaic language is a key component of successful language use and one of the resources that helps bilinguals learn new words. In accordance with Carrol and Conklin (2019), formulaic language includes fixed terms, collocations, and idioms. Thus, formulaic expressions enable learners to enhance fluency, comprehension, and retention. Mangold et al. (2024) assert that for bilingual learners who are a part of two linguistic systems, vocabulary acquisition is a crucial component of language learning. However, as bilingual learners learn words in two languages, evaluating their vocabulary is difficult (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2024).

According to Lee and Van Lancker Sidtis (2020), exposure to formulaic language is especially crucial for individuals who are bilingual. This is due to the fact that it fills the gap between pragmatic fluency and linguistic competence. The form, meaning, and contextual contingencies of formulaic expressions are difficult for second language speakers to learn (Paquot & Granger, 2012). This is because a formulaic expression that contains a substituted lexical item or a nonstandard prosodic contour is typically interpreted as a humorous gesture or a mistake by second language speakers (Bell, 2012; Rammell et al., 2017). Furthermore, Capone and Braci (2024) acknowledge that formulaic phrases integrate contextual and cultural peculiarities, unlike isolated vocabulary terms. This is to give learners the tools to go through complex social interactions in both their first language (L1) and second language (L2). Therefore, this makes formulaic language not just a linguistic tool, but also a means for cultural competence and social integration.

Formulaic expressions, or "formulemes," have been researched in the linguistic sciences through the use of surveys and sentence completion tasks (Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015), word connection (Clark, 1970), interpretation and recognition (Libben & Titone, 2008; Van Lancker Sidtis, 2003), language acquisition plans (Reuterskiöld & Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012), auditory/acoustic measures (Lieberman, 1963; Yang & Van Lancker Sidtis, 2016), speech errors (Nooteboom, 2011), and surveys. Eye tracking and response times are two examples of psycholinguistic designs that have been used to try and identify the principles that differentiate formulaic and newly produced language (Siyanova-Chanturia et al., 2011; Underwood, et al. 2004). Computational methods and corpus linguistics have

concentrated on mutual information scores (Paquot & Granger, 2012) and collocation frequencies (Biber, 2009; Conrad & Biber, 2004). Semantic similarity metrics (Bannard, Baldwin, & Lascarides, 2003) and Latent Semantic Analysis (Schone & Jurafsky, 2001) have been employed in corpus linguistic techniques.

Despite its crucial role, research on how formulaic language impacts vocabulary acquisition in bilingual learners regarding its effects on retention, usage, and pragmatic understanding remains under explored. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of formulaic language on vocabulary acquisition in bilingual learners. This is with focus on both retention and usage across L1 and L2. Additionally, this study examines how cultural and contextual peculiarities influence the comprehension and application of formulaic expressions.

Objectives

i. To examine the impact of formulaic language on vocabulary acquisition in Yoruba-English bilingual learners in Lagos.
ii. To identify patterns in vocabulary retention among L1 and L2 learners exposed to multi-word expressions.
iii. To explore students' ability to use formulaic language in practical communication scenarios.

Research Questions

i. How does the use of formulaic language improve vocabulary acquisition among Yoruba-English bilingual secondary students in Lagos?
ii. What role does formulaic language play in vocabulary retention in both L1 and L2 learners?
iii. Are there differences in the effectiveness of formulaic language between L1 and L2 learners in this region?

Significance of the Study

First, one of the key benefits for students is improved academic performance. Enhanced vocabulary acquisition leads to better performance in English and Yoruba language examinations. Consequently, this improvement boosts their grades and also promotes a deeper understanding of the languages. Additionally, the study emphasizes cultural preservation The dual focus on language and culture enriches their overall educational experience.

However, for educators, the study presents opportunities for innovative teaching strategies. It provides findings into how formulaic language can be integrated into bilingual education curriculums. This integration makes lessons more engaging and relevant to students' lives. Furthermore, the research offers practical tools for teachers.

They can use the findings to design lessons that promote vocabulary retention and usage effectively. As a result, educators enhance their teaching methods, making them more effective in promoting student learning.

Finally, from a research perspective, the study makes a significant contribution to bilingualism studies. It adds to the growing body of work on how formulaic language influences bilingual vocabulary acquisition. This contribution is vital for understanding the complexities of language learning. Moreover, the focus on Lagos provides localised insights. By highlighting the role of socio-cultural context in language learning, the study underscores the importance of considering local factors in linguistic research. Thus, it strengthens the academic discourse surrounding bilingualism and its various influences.

Socioenvironmental Background of the Study

In the highly multilingual setting of Nigeria, English holds a unique position as the official language and primary medium of formal communication (Adetunji, 2015). As a former British colony, English serves as a lingua franca for diverse ethnolinguistic groups which facilitates interaction in a linguistically diverse nation (Adegbija, 1994). While indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are widely spoken, English dominates in education, governance, and business.

Nigeria's educational system reflects significant socio-economic disparities, with schools categorised into three broad types. First are the elite private schools (Ayling & Wallace, 2024). These schools cater to high-income families and often follow international curricula, such as the British or American systems. They provide a high-quality English-medium education and have access to well-trained teachers and modern facilities. Another category is government-funded public schools (Philip et al., 2025). These schools serve children from middle- and low-income families. Though English is the official medium of instruction. However, Ntuli and Mudau (2024) observe that classroom interactions sometimes take place in indigenous languages. Meanwhile, the low-cost private schools cater to children from impoverished families (Härmä, 2013). These schools offer a formal English-medium education but suffer from poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and underqualified teachers. In reality, instruction in these schools is often bilingual, with significant reliance on the local languages.

Children attending government and low-cost private schools typically have minimal exposure to English outside of school. As noted by Usman (2014), many teachers lack adequate training and confidence in using English, which compromises their ability to effectively impart language skills to students. Efforts by the Nigerian government to promote English in schools have faced criticism due to systemic challenges, including insufficient teacher training programs, inadequate teaching resources, and poor school infrastructure (Babajide & Smith, 2022; Enyiazu, 2022). Consequently, students graduating from these schools often find themselves ill-prepared to meet the academic

demands of tertiary institutions, where English is the sole medium of instruction. This issue is particularly pronounced in rural and low-income urban areas, where children's primary exposure to English comes from teachers who are not proficient speakers of the language.

The school that participated in this study belongs to the category of government-funded or low-cost private schools and caters to children from low-income families in Lagos. These children are not highly proficient in English, and their limited exposure to the language is mediated through teachers who themselves are L2 speakers and lack robust proficiency. Additionally, the influence of indigenous languages on the processing of English vocabulary is significant. This socioenvironmental context frames the challenges of English vocabulary acquisition in Nigeria and highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve English language teaching and learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Formulaic Language

According to Gilquin (2024), word or expression sequences that commonly occur together and frequently go through processing by the brain as a single unit are referred to as formulaic language. Formulaicity is described by Erman and Warren (2000) in the context of lexical choice: "formulaic" choices are positions in utterances that are constrained by their appearance in fixed words (Sinclair, 1991). But according to Gheitasi (2022), formulaic expressions include conventional and multiword units such as counting, swearing, idioms, proverbs, pause fillers, and informal speech formulae. Despite their diversity, these expressions all share two crucial traits: they are known to speakers of a language community and they are not newly constructed using syntactic conventions to mix words (Rammell et al., 2017).

In addition to idioms, formulaic expressions can also be "lexical bundles," complicated propositions and verbs, turns of phrase, collocations and binomials, complete phrases, and even longer linguistic material sequences like poems or songs (Tremblay et al., 2011; Siyanova-Chanturia, 2013). In line with Contreras Kallens and Christiansen (2022), the study of idiomatic expressions was the first historical instance of the standard words-and-rules technique being used with units that span many lexical items. Idioms are defined as phrases whose meaning is independent of its constituent parts (Pinker, 1999). For instance, according to Contreras Kallens and Christiansen (2022), neither the individual words nor the syntactic combination of "he," "bit," "the," and "bullet" could imply that the sentence "he bit the bullet" indicates that the subject of the sentence accepted unpleasant consequences (rather than that the subject actually bit a bullet). In contrast to innovative expressions, formulaic expressions such as idioms, proverbs, and conversational speech formulas, invoke peculiar characteristics and serve a communicative function.

The fluency that distinguishes native-like language use is also made possible by formulaic expressions (Pawley and Syder, 1983). Unrestricted lexical item selection and from-scratch sentence construction are unlikely to produce the speech patterns associated with native proficiency, given the high cognitive demands that language use places on speakers and listeners (Christiansen and Chater, 2016). By restricting the options for which phrases to employ when conveying specific meanings, which words to use within them, and which order to use them in, formulaic expressions enable speakers to attain this fluency (Sinclair, 1991).

Like idioms, formulaic expressions behave abnormally in relation to the fundamental difference between creation and storage that forms the basis of the word-and-rules viewpoint. Conventionalised meaning, stereotyped patterns, and pragmatic use are three characteristics of formulaic language (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012). According to Lee and Van Lancker Sidtis (2020), formulaic terms are set, have canonical forms, and primarily have nonliteral meanings with imbedded implications. These unitary word strings are well-known and frequently used by native speakers (and occasionally nonnative speakers as well). Additionally, according to Siyanova-Chanturia and Pellicer-Sanchez (2018), they may be continuous or discontinuous. Additionally, they can be non-compositional: the structurally similar collocations "carpet sweeping" (the carpet by a brush) and "vacuum cleaning" (something by a vacuum) differ in what is being cleaned by whom (Cacciari, 2014). As a result, they can be positioned within a compositionality continuum. But unlike idiomatic expressions, they are widely used and play a significant role in both the actual usage of the language and what it means to learn it. This implies that the issue with this account goes beyond what can be easily banished to the linguistic fringes and further undercuts the solution of keeping idioms in the lexicon to support the separation between it and the grammar (Contreras Kallens & Christiansen, 2022).

Pragmatic language, which is crucial for social and functional communication goals, includes formulaic phrases made up of prefabricated language units (Wray & Perkins, 2000). Formulaic language has special pragmatic purposes, like preserving speech flow and promoting rapport and camaraderie amongst interlocutors (Van Lancker Sidtis & Sidtis, 2018). According to Rammell et al. (2017), formulaic expressions serve a variety of communicative purposes, such as humour, interpersonal bonding, sociological group identity, attitudinal and emotional expression, linguistic play, and the transmission of cultural memes and nonliteral meanings. According to Contreras Kallens and Christiansen (2022), formulaic expressions have been found to constitute a significant part of the use of language by native speakers. Approximately one-fourth of conversational speech in healthy American English speakers is composed of formulaic language, which is a clear indication of its relevance in both written and spoken discourse (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012; Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015). The prevalence of formulaic language and its importance are demonstrated by the significant percentage of it in written texts and naturalistic

discourse (Lee & Van Lancker Sidtis, 2020). Comprehending the processing, retention, and recall of formulaic expressions from memory help to build more comprehensive models of language processing.

Relationship between Knowledge of Formulaic Sequences and Language Proficiency

Zhang et al. (2022) posit that the first crucial step in becoming a skilled language user is learning the formulaic expressions of a given language. These are typically employed to convey certain meanings (Pawley & Syder, 1983). Furthermore, the literature review on formulaic sequences and language competency during the last ten years reveals inconsistent results from research on the connection between formulaic sequence knowledge and language ability (Rafieyan, 2018). While some research has shown that a greater level of language proficiency is correlated with a greater understanding of formulaic sequences (Qi & Ding, 2011; Rafieyan, 2018), other research has found little to no correlation between formulaic sequence knowledge and language proficiency (Staples et al., 2013; Serrano et al., 2015).

A study by Staples et al. (2023) investigated whether Chinese learners of English as a foreign language enhance their usage of formulaic sequences in terms of frequency, accuracy, and diversity between years one and four corroborated the findings of Qi and Ding (2011). The study found that language learners improve their usage of formulaic sequences in speech during the course of their university education, and that diverse developmental patterns were observed in the dimensions of frequency, correctness, and variance indexing formulaic sequence performance. Similarly, the association between language competency and formulaic sequence understanding was investigated by Rafieyan (2018). The Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient analysis revealed a significant positive link between language learners' competency level and their understanding of formulaic sequences. Furthermore, several studies have examined the role that correspondence between L1 and L2 plays in online processing of formulaic language (Carrol et al. 2016). If formulaic language is similar in form and meaning between the two languages of a speaker, then the speaker performs better on comprehension and production tasks, which may indicate faster processing (Paquot and Naets 2015; Pritchett et al. 2016).

The Comparison of Bilingual and Monolingual Language Development

Research on bilinguals' L2 development shows that bilingual children perform worse than their monolingual classmates in the majority of language processing domains, frequently matching monolinguals with specific language impairments in terms of scores (Ebert and Kohnert, 2016). Although the results of studies examining L1 in bilinguals are less clear, several show that bilinguals score worse than their monolingual counterparts (Winsler et al., 1999; Fabiano-Smith and Barlow, 2010). In fact, studies on adult heritage speakers

show that formal education and literacy in the majority language (L2) frequently lead to the incomplete acquisition of the heritage (L1) language (Montrul, 2008). According to Sorace (2005), this is because heritage speakers are exposed to varying levels of language input in the minority language, primarily from their parents, whose language may have already attrited. But according to Harman et al. (2017), the distinctions between bilingual and monolingual kids shouldn't obscure the parallels between the two developmental trajectories.

According to a number of studies, bilinguals and monolinguals reach developmental milestones similar to one another. A developmental milestone is the age at which a child starts learning a particular linguistic ability. Grammatical development (Genesee and Nicoladis, 2007; Paradis, 2009), phonological development (Fabiano-Smith and Barlow, 2010), and lexical development (Pearson et al., 1993; Hoff et al., 2012) all support this. Taking into account both languages of the bilingual, for instance, bilinguals and monolinguals have matching vocabulary capacities and phonological inventories, and both speak their first words around the age of one (Fabiano-Smith and Barlow, 2010; Hoff et al., 2012). Additionally, there is evidence that bilinguals and monolinguals of similar ages do not vary in their ability to construct coherent conversation (Paradis and Kirova, 2014). Research findings indicate that bilingual development is unique, and that monolingual norms should not be extended to bilingual speakers (Armon-Lotem et al., 2015).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the impact of formulaic language on vocabulary acquisition, retention, and usage among bilingual learners in a Nigerian context. This design was adopted because it allows for the objective measurement of participants' performance on standardised tests. Additionally, it ensures replicability and generalisability of findings.

Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study comprises bilingual learners aged 12 to 18 attending low-cost private schools and government-funded public schools in Lagos, Nigeria. These schools were chosen because they represent the socio-environmental context where English is taught as a second language (L2) to children whose first language (L1) is typically Yoruba.

The sample size is 100 participants. As part of inclusion criteria, students must have completed at least five years of formal English instruction. In addition, students must be identified as bilingual, with their L1 being Yoruba and L2 being English.

Sampling Strategy

The study employs a stratified random sampling strategy to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and school types (low-cost private and government-funded public schools). The sample was divided into two strata based on school type: 50 participants from low-cost private schools and 50 participants from government-funded public schools. However, within each stratum, participants were randomly selected from the list of eligible students to eliminate selection bias. This approach ensures that the sample reflects the diversity of socio-economic and educational backgrounds within the target population.

Data Collection Procedure

Pre-Test: This study adopted survey with list of items that were not predefined at this stage. All participants completed the standardised vocabulary test designed to assess baseline knowledge of formulaic expressions and isolated vocabulary items. The test included 30 formulaic expressions which are largely collocations and idioms. This list is presented in the Appendix. The test was conducted in written format under controlled conditions to minimise distractions and ensure consistency. Moreso, participants' responses were transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis, with researcher following a standardised transcription protocol to ensure accuracy.

Exposure Phase: Participants were exposed to a curated list of 30 formulaic expressions in their L2) over a three-week period. At this stage, the participants have been exposed to the meanings of the formulaic expressions. The exposure activities included: Contextualised reading passages and listening tasks using audio materials. These tasks were embedded within regular English classes and included comprehension exercises designed to contextualise the formulaic expressions. Researcher observed classroom activities and documented participants' engagement levels and verbal responses.

Post-Test: After the three-week exposure phase, participants completed a post-test identical in structure to the pre-test to measure immediate retention of formulaic expressions and the ability to use these expressions in context.

Delayed Test: A follow-up test was conducted four weeks after the post-test. This was to assess long-term retention of the formulaic expressions.

Analytical Methods

For data coding and categorisation, the formulaic expressions were categorised into pre-defined groups based on their linguistic properties (e.g., collocations, idioms, pause fillers). Thereafter, coding of participants' responses was performed manually.

Additionally, the collected data were analysed using statistical methods to evaluate the impact of formulaic language exposure on vocabulary acquisition. The mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage scores for the pre-test, post-test, and delayed test were calculated to summarise participants' performance. Thereafter, comparisons were made between the two groups (low-cost private schools vs. government-funded schools).

For ethical considerations, written consent was obtained from school authorities and parents/guardians before participants were included in the study. Moreover, all participants were assigned unique identifiers to protect their identities, and data were securely stored. Importantly, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. This methodology ensures a rigorous, ethical, and objective approach to investigating the role of formulaic language in vocabulary acquisition among bilingual learners in Nigeria.

Data Analysis

The study involved 100 participants, equally divided between two groups: low-cost private school students (Group A) and government-funded public-school students (Group B). Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed tests to assess the impact of formulaic language exposure on vocabulary retention and usage. Importantly, data were sorted and coded manually.

Research Question 1: How does exposure to formulaic expressions affect vocabulary retention?

Table 1: Vocabulary retention

Test Phase	Group A (Low-Cost Private)	Group B (Government-Funded)
Pre-Test	12.5	10.8
Post-Test	22.1	18.4
Delayed Test	19.3	16.2

As shown in Table 1, there was a significant increase in scores for formulaic expressions in the post-test compared to the pre-test for both groups: **Group A**: From 12.5 (pre-test) to 22.1 (post-test), indicating a 76.8% improvement; **Group B**: From 10.8 (pre-test) to 18.4 (post-test), indicating a 70.4% improvement. On the delayed test, both groups showed a slight decline in scores, but retention remained relatively high: **Group A**: 19.3 (delayed test), retaining 87.3% of the post-test score and **Group B**: 16.2 (delayed test), retaining 88% of the post-test score. The statistics is presented in Figure 1. Therefore, exposure to formulaic expressions significantly improved vocabulary retention in both groups. However, Group A (low-cost private school students) outperformed Group B

(government-funded public-school students) in both immediate and long-term retention, likely due to better resources and learning conditions.

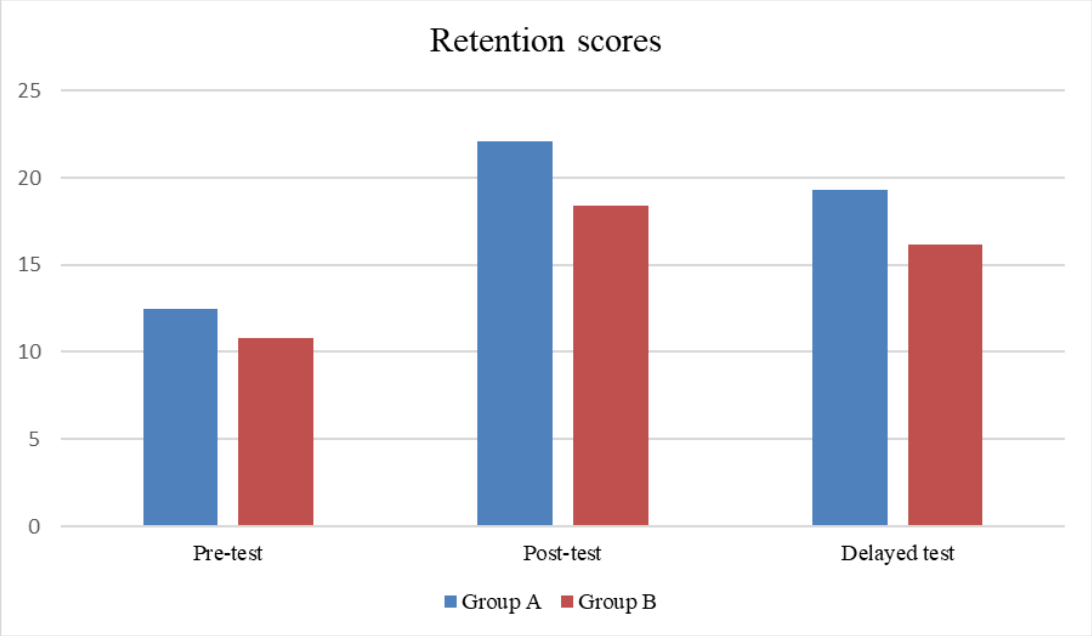


Figure 1: Vocabulary retention

Research Question 2: How does exposure to formulaic expressions affect vocabulary usage in communication?

Table 2: Usage Scores for Speaking and Writing

Task	Group A (Mean Score)	Group B (Mean Score)
Speaking	8.2	6.7
Writing	7.8	6.4

As illustrated in Table 2, Group A achieved higher scores in using formulaic expressions in speaking and writing tasks. In **Speaking**, Group A had 8.2 while Group B had 6.7. However, in **Writing**, Group A had 7.8 while Group B had 6.4. This is represented in Figure 2. It is observable that the usage scores were generally lower than retention scores. Thus, indicating that while students retained formulaic expressions, applying them in communication required additional practice. Therefore, exposure to formulaic expressions improved the ability to use them in communication, but effectiveness varied by group. This is because Group A demonstrated better integration of formulaic expressions into speaking and writing. Hence, suggesting that access to better teaching methods and resources enhances practical application.

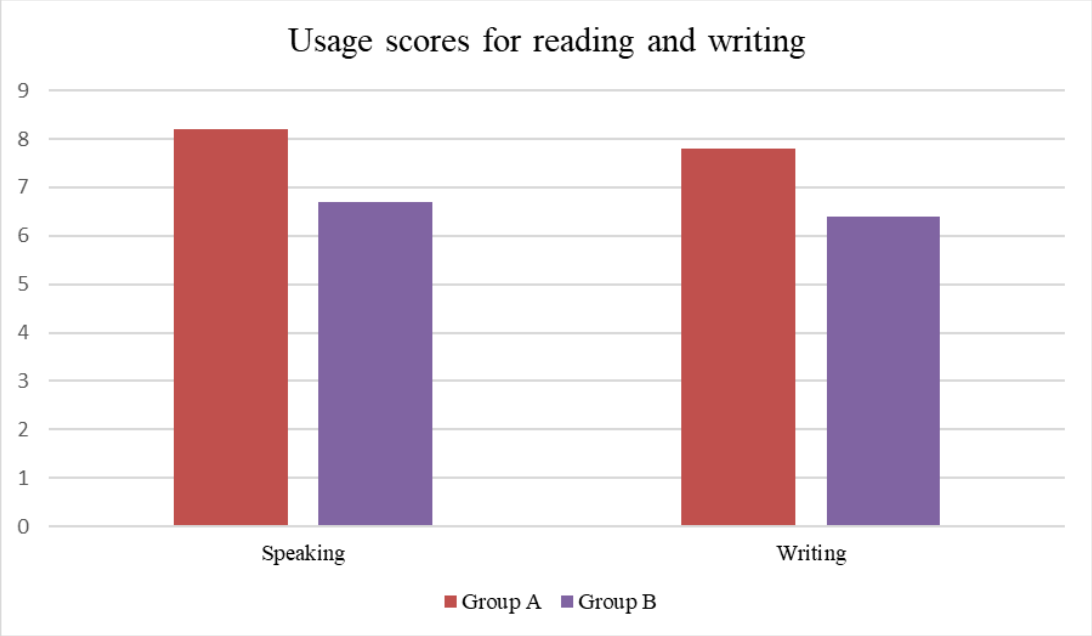


Figure 2: Usage in reading and writing

Research Question 3: How do cultural and contextual peculiarities influence the retention and usage of formulaic expressions?

Table 3: Contextual Appropriateness Scores

Group	Mean Score (Max: 10)
Group A	8.4
Group B	7.1

Group A scored higher in contextual appropriateness tests with 8.4 out of 10 while Group B scored 7.1 out of 10. The data is presented in Table 3 and Figure 3. The results reveal that participants from Group A were better able to use formulaic expressions in culturally and pragmatically appropriate ways. Thus, reflecting greater exposure to contextualised teaching methods during the exposure phase. It was found that cultural and contextual understanding significantly influenced the ability to use formulaic expressions appropriately. Therefore, Group A's higher scores suggest that the quality of instruction and exposure to authentic materials play a crucial role in fostering pragmatic competence.

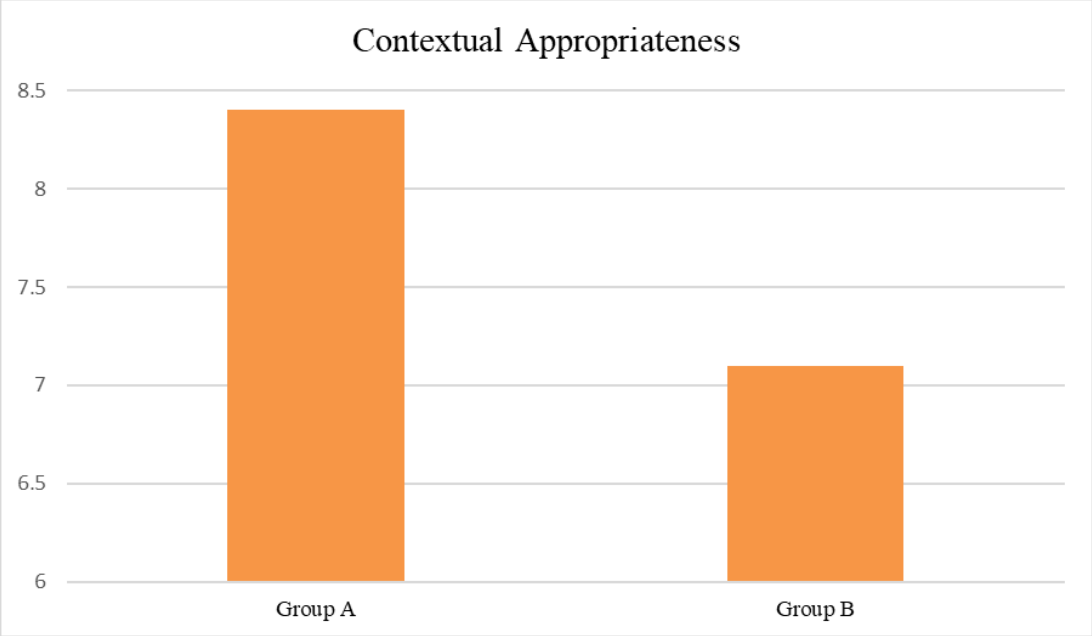


Figure 3: Contextual Appropriateness

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study on the effects of formulaic language exposure on vocabulary retention, usage, and contextual appropriateness among bilingual learners in Nigeria. First, the study demonstrated that exposure to formulaic expressions significantly improved both immediate and long-term retention for bilingual learners. Group A (low-cost private school students) outperformed Group B (government-funded public-school students) across all test phases. Thus, suggesting that better teaching methods and resources contributed to improved performance. The improved retention of formulaic expressions aligns with Pawley and Syder's (1983) assertion that formulaic language facilitates fluency and reduces cognitive load during language processing. Formulaic expressions are stored as single units in the brain (Erman & Warren, 2000; Sinclair, 1991), which enhances memory retrieval. This reflects the findings by Siyanova-Chanturia (2013) that formulaic sequences are easier to retain because they are processed holistically rather than as individual lexical items.

Furthermore, the better performance of Group A also reflects higher-quality exposure to formulaic expressions which is usually incorporated contextualised and repeated use. This mirrors findings by Carrol et al. (2016) and Paquot and Naets (2015), who observed that bilingual learners retain formulaic expressions more effectively when there is form-meaning congruence between their L1 and L2. For Group B, limited exposure to high-quality English teaching likely contributed to their lower retention scores. This is consistent with Rammell et al.'s (2017) observation that impoverished input reduces the efficacy of formulaic language acquisition.

Moreover, the study found that while retention scores improved significantly, usage scores (in speaking and writing tasks) were lower, especially for Group B. Group A demonstrated better integration of formulaic expressions into communication, indicating that exposure alone is insufficient without opportunities for active practice. This aligns with Wray and Perkins (2000), who emphasized that formulaic language serves pragmatic functions, such as facilitating rapport and maintaining conversational flow. For Group B, limited opportunities for interaction and practice likely hindered their ability to apply formulaic expressions effectively, strengthening Van Lancker Sidtis and Rallon's (2004) findings that impoverished linguistic environments constrain the development of formulaic language use. However, the gap between retention and usage highlights the role of formulaic expressions in facilitating native-like fluency, as discussed by Pawley and Syder (1983). Formulaic expressions reduce processing demands during speech and allow speakers to focus on higher-level pragmatic and social goals (Christiansen & Chater, 2016). However, the observed gap between retention and usage is consistent with Rafieyan's (2018) findings that knowledge of formulaic sequences does not automatically translate into proficient application without practice.

The study revealed that Group A achieved higher scores in using formulaic expressions appropriately in context, reflecting a better understanding of cultural and pragmatic peculiarities. However, Group B while showing improvement, struggled more with appropriateness. Similar to this, the importance of contextual appropriateness in formulaic language use is well-documented in the literature. Van Lancker Sidtis (2012) and Rammell et al. (2017) highlighted that formulaic expressions carry nonliteral meanings and cultural connotations, which require learners to move beyond linguistic comprehension to pragmatic competence. The ability of Group A to outperform Group B in this area suggests exposure to culturally rich input, consistent with findings by Contreras Kallens and Christiansen (2022) that formulaic language is deeply tied to cultural memes and social functions. Meanwhile, the struggles of Group B can be linked to their limited exposure to authentic English input. Paquot and Naets (2015) observed that bilingual learners perform better when formulaic expressions in L2 share form-meaning congruence with L1, but when such congruence is absent, contextual understanding becomes more challenging. For Nigerian bilinguals, whose L1 (Yoruba) differs structurally and pragmatically from English, explicit instruction in pragmatic use is crucial for mastering contextual appropriateness.

The study's results underscore the critical role of formulaic language in bilingual development, particularly in contexts where learners navigate between their L1 and L2. Group A's higher performance in retention, usage, and contextual appropriateness reflects the benefits of quality input and instruction, while Group B's struggles highlight the challenges of limited resources and exposure. The findings align with Van Lancker Sidtis and Sidtis (2018), who emphasized the role of formulaic expressions in building fluency

and facilitating social bonding. Moreover, the results reflect the complexity of bilingual language development, where proficiency in L2 is influenced by the quality and quantity of input (Harman et al., 2017). The observed performance gap between Group A and Group B reflects findings by Sorace (2005) that bilingual learners' language input often varies in quality, affecting their ability to master L2. Interestingly, the study also supports Gathercole's (2013) argument that bilingual development follows its own trajectory and should not be directly compared to monolingual norms. Both groups exhibited progress in formulaic language use, but their developmental paths were shaped by socio-environmental factors such as school type and instructional quality.

Conclusion, Implications of Study and Suggestion for Further Studies

This study highy the critical role of formulaic language in bilingual vocabulary acquisition, retention, and usage. This is more relevant in socio-educational contexts where disparities in resources and instructional quality exist. Specifically, the findings reveal that bilingual learners exposed to high-quality, contextualised instruction in formulaic expressions demonstrate superior retention, contextual appropriateness, and usage in communication. Conversely, the challenges faced by learners in under-resourced schools highlight the need for targeted interventions to bridge these gaps.

To improve formulaic language acquisition and usage among bilingual learners, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Incorporate formulaic expressions into classroom activities such as role-plays, storytelling, and collaborative group tasks. Additionally, there is need to develop culturally relevant materials that align with learners' backgrounds. Thus, enabling easier comprehension and meaningful engagement with formulaic expressions.
2. Provide professional development programs for teachers to enhance their ability to teach formulaic language effectively. Also, there is need to equip teachers with resources such as formulaic language guides, lesson plans, and classroom activities that integrate formulaic expressions into the broader language curriculum.
3. Ensure learners are exposed to authentic formulaic expressions through high-quality input such as multimedia resources (e.g., movies, podcasts, and songs) and interaction with proficient speakers.
4. Integrate formulaic expressions into language curricula for bilingual learners. This is emphasis on their role in developing fluency, pragmatic competence, and cultural understanding.

Importantly, this study opens opportunities for future research to deepen the understanding of formulaic language acquisition. First, there is need for a study that compares the acquisition and use of formulaic language across different regions or countries, especially in contexts with varying levels of resource availability and cultural exposure to English.

Also, there is need to conduct longitudinal studies to track learners' development of formulaic language competence over extended periods. Thus, exploring the impact of sustained exposure and practice. Furthermore, studies can examine the role of digital tools, such as language learning apps and AI-powered platforms, in teaching and reinforcing formulaic expressions.

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Appendix: List of Formulaic Expressions Used in Testing Participants

The table below contains the formulaic expressions used in the study for testing the participants. The expressions are provided in **English (L2)**.

Category	**English (L2)**
Idioms	He's got his head in the clouds
	Cat got your tongue?
	Bite the bullet
	A blessing in disguise
	Break the ice
Collocations	Make a decision
	Heavy rain
	Fast food
	Strong tea
	Pay attention
Proverbs	A stitch in time saves nine
	The early bird catches the worm
	Don't judge a book by its cover
	Actions speak louder than words
	Two heads are better than one

Conversational Phrases	I'll get back to you later
	Let's call it a day
	How are you doing?
	Nice to meet you
	What's up?
Binomials	Back and forth
	Safe and sound
	Give and take
	Black and white
	Now and then
Pause Fillers	You know
	I mean
	Let me think
	Well
	Actually