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Type: **Research-oriented Oral Face-to-face presentation**

Multi-word expressions as keys to learner autonomy in writing

Sunday 18 May 2025 13:05 (25 minutes)

TITLE

Multi-word expressions as keys to learner autonomy in writing

RELEVANT SIG

College and University Educators (CUE)

FORMAT

Research-oriented Oral Face-to-face presentation (25 minutes, including Q&A)

Short English description

KEYWORDS

multi-word units, writing pedagogy

First-time presenter?

ABSTRACT

This study expands on Nattinger and DeCarrico's (1992) concept of lexical phrases—multi-word expressions used as pragmatically appropriate responses in writing, such as this essay will discuss (sign-posting) and on the other hand (metadiscourse). These phrases function as linguistic glue in essays and articles. While prior research has identified patterns of overuse (e.g., Chen & Baker, 2016) or underuse (e.g., McKenny, 2010) of these phrases by L2 English writers, comparisons often focus on L2 vs. L1 writers rather than the developmental trajectory of learners' phrase use.

This study addresses this gap by examining lexical phrase development across four semesters in an English for Academic Purposes program. Tracking usage over five essays and correlating with TOEFL scores, findings reveal that learners initially rely heavily on lexical phrases when encountering a new genre, transitioning toward personalized styles in later submissions. Learners with lower TOEFL scores consistently used more phrases, regardless of essay length.

These results suggest lexical phrases serve as scaffolding, enabling learners to articulate ideas within genre conventions, enhancing their agency for self-expression. The results are discussed in practical terms and classroom activities promoting phrase and genre acquisition and use will be presented.

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