

# Formulaic Language and EFL Text Memorization: Opportunities for Acquisition

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Many researchers agree that formulaic language is one of the key factors that distinguishes natural or native-like usage of a target language from utterances that, while grammatically accurate, would not normally be used by native speakers and are therefore regarded as marked or "unnatural" (Cowie, 1992; Ellis, 1996; Howarth, 1998; Swan, 2006). Even with advanced knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, students' English may be far from native-speaker-like, and "what lets them down is likely to be their imperfect mastery of formulaic language, especially collocation and situationally-bound language," observes Swan (2006), noting that languages may even have "preferred formulaic sequences for virtually every recurrent situation that their speakers commonly refer to." Ellis (1996: 97) agrees with this assessment: "Speaking natively is speaking idiomatically using frequent and familiar collocations, and learners thus have to acquire these familiar word sequences." Similarly, Cowie (1992: 11): "It is impossible to perform at a level acceptable to native users . . . without controlling an appropriate range of multiword units." Howarth (1998: 38) also agrees: "It appears that the ability to manipulate such clusters is a sign of true native speaker competence and is a useful indicator of degrees of proficiency across the boundary between non-native and native competence." Swan (2006) argues that it is unrealistic to expect all learners to strive for native-like proficiency, but acknowledges the benefit of advising learners to pay attention to and memorize formulaic language, provided that classroom time devoted to this pursuit is not excessive.

As can be seen above, there is no lack of terminology for the linguistic phenomenon of recurring word combinations: formulaic language, formulaic utterances, formulae, patterns, sequences, prefabricated patterns/sequences/utterances/language ("prefabs"),

lexical strings, chunks, and clusters. Certain types of word combinations can also be more narrowly classified under specific subcategories, including idioms, collocations, and frames. Swan (2006) also mentions "fixed phrases" that may or may not also be idioms, such as the non-idiom *this morning*, as well as "situationally-bound preferred formulae." As an example of the latter, *Could you give me a hand for a second?* (*Couldja gimme a hand for a sec'?*) is certainly preferred by most native speakers over *Are you able to give me help now?* In addition to the large number of terms for formulaic language, the situation is further complicated by the fact that no consensus exists regarding how to classify and subcategorize such word combinations. However, as Swan points out, there is general agreement that formulaic chunks "behave more like individual words than like separately constructed sequences." Pinker (1994: 148) agrees with this assessment, pointing out that a "word" can consist of a "rote-memorized chunk: a string of linguistic stuff . . . arbitrarily associated with a particular meaning, one item from . . . the mental dictionary."

While there is broad agreement on the significance and importance of formulaic sequences, the question of how they are acquired and how to "teach" them is not so easily answered. Two issues of particular relevance are the degree of importance of *conscious learning*, including the twin concepts of *noticing* and *paying attention* (Schmidt, 1990), and perhaps more specifically, the notion of *focus on form* (Long, 1991). Whether overt focus on form is actually a necessary requirement for approaching native-like proficiency is still uncertain, but in any case, it may contribute to a faster and more efficient language acquisition process (Doughty & Williams, 1998). A related question is to what degree learners derive grammatical rules from prefabricated utterances. Research in this area is inconclusive, but as Granger (1998: 158) points out, merely exposing learners to formulaic "prefabs" is not sufficient for acquisition of grammar. The potential value of some type of conscious focus on form is supported by studies of immersion and naturalistic language acquisition demonstrating that when learning is exclusively "experiential and meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to targetlike levels" (Doughty & Williams, 1998: 2). One particularly relevant example of this is a study of Canadian students fluent in French after years of meaning-focused instruction in immersion programs, whose speech nevertheless exhibited

numerous grammatical errors and was still far from native-like idiomaticity (Swain, 1991). As mentioned earlier, there is broad agreement among researchers that formulaic language is a key factor distinguishing native-like usage, so it is certainly safe to assume that, in addition to imperfect grammar, an insufficient command of appropriate formulaic language played some role in this lack of "native-like idiomaticity."

Learners of second languages are occasionally required to memorize dialogues or narrative passages as homework, and this affords one potential method of noticing and possibly acquiring formulaic language. Conversely, noticing collocations and grouping words into meaningful chunks can facilitate the memorization process. Noticing and memorizing formulaic sequences *in context* in this way is likely to be more enjoyable and require less effort than learning them in isolation, from a list, or through some other method that provides no meaningful context. "Rote" memorization may be perceived as uncreative or boring, but this need not be the case. A comprehensive method that utilizes the complementary approaches of *logic/analysis* and *imagination/visualization* to "process" the text even before beginning to actually memorize it can be very effective and even enjoyable. This was demonstrated in an earlier article by this author (Harris, 2015) through analysis and discussion of an appropriate text selected for illustrative purposes: one of the shortest of fifteen chapters (*Chapter 8: Dinner with Barbossa*, pp.17-18) from a graded reader in the *Penguin Readers* series designed for extensive reading. The book (Trimble *et al*, 2007), based on the popular 2003 Walt Disney film *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, belongs to Level 2 of the series, making it a lower-level selection. (The series has a total of seven levels, numbered 1-6 with an even easier level called "Easystarts" preceding Level 1.) The same text will be used here to demonstrate how formulaic language can be *noticed* (and possibly acquired) in the course of analyzing and memorizing a passage written in the target language, as well as how formulaic chunks can render the memorization process faster and easier. The earlier article presented a comprehensive memorization method based on an initial top-down analysis of the general content, followed by a more detailed bottom-up analysis of the actual lexis and grammar, and incorporating fundamental strategies for memorization such as those listed in Winter & Winter (1997: 102-105): organization of information, breaking things into smaller chunks, dividing into categories of related items, making

associations, and use of cadence (i.e. rhyme, rhythm, etc.).

For reference, a short synopsis of the chapter used as an illustrative text is reproduced here from the earlier article:

A young woman, Elizabeth Turner, has been taken prisoner aboard a pirate ship, the *Black Pearl*, and is sitting alone at a table with the captain of the ship, Captain Barbosa. This scene represents a major turning point in the plot of the story because it is here that Elizabeth discovers that the pirates who have captured her are no ordinary pirates. All members of the crew of the *Black Pearl* are the victims of an Aztec curse, which has rendered them "undead" (they appear in skeletal form when bathed in moonlight). They cannot be killed in the conventional sense or even wounded in the same way as humans (which works to their advantage in battle), but they are also unable to satisfy their hunger, thirst, or other physical desires, and this insatiability is a torment to them. Elizabeth also discovers why she was abducted: her blood is one of the things the pirates need in order to lift the curse, or so they believe at this point.

For purposes of illustration, the text (a total of 60 sentences) was divided into eight sections, and a detailed bottom-up analysis of the first section was provided (Harris, 2015). In this article, the same analysis will be applied to the remaining seven sections, with a particular focus on formulaic language and its role in the memorization process. The eight sections are as follows:

1. Setting the scene
2. Elizabeth eats & drinks
3. But Barbosa can't eat
4. Explanation of gold & curse: the "bad news"
5. The "good news"
6. Explanation of why Elizabeth was abducted
7. Action
8. The big "reveal"

Before analyzing a text for memorization it is helpful to physically rearrange it into individual sentences, ideally one per line, to increase legibility. In this case, there are also three distinct *types* of sentences: narration, lines uttered by Barbossa, and lines uttered by Elizabeth. The use of color is a convenient way to distinguish the three types at a glance, but here they will be distinguished as follows: Barbossa's lines in **bold with underlining**, Elizabeth's lines in ***bold italics***, and narration as normal text. Another important step is to identify meaningful word groups (enclosed in brackets in the illustrative text below), some of which will of course be collocations or other useful formulaic chunks. Grouping words in this way provides valuable opportunities for learners to *notice* and memorize formulaic language. As discussed earlier, chunks tend to behave as individual "words," and are therefore best memorized that way. In addition to focusing on word groups and formulaic language, other important steps in the analysis include the following: (1) noticing (or *creating*) logical connections and associations between each sentence, especially between the final sentence of each section and the first sentence of the next, and (2) identifying serendipitously "built-in" mnemonic aids, including symmetries, rhymes, rhythms, common threads, and other patterns and coincidences.

#### *SECTION 1: SETTING THE SCENE (3 sentences)*

Elizabeth sat [at a table] [on the *Black Pearl*].

[There was] [a lot of food] [on the table]—[bread, fruit, and meat].

[Captain Barbossa] sat [at [the other end] [of the table]]

Most of the words in Section 1 belong to natural word groupings, as can be seen through the use of brackets above, including two commonly used prefabricated chunks: *a lot of* . . . (best treated as a single word, especially since it is synonymous with the single word *much*) and *the other end*. The latter chunk is in turn part of the longer formulaic sequence *at the other end of the (table)*. As mentioned above, a detailed analysis of Section 1 was provided in the earlier article, so only brief summaries of key points in the original analysis are included below for reference. (The full text of all eight sections is provided in the Appendix.)

1. The word *table* provides a common thread tying all three sentences together, with a natural flow from Elizabeth at one end of the table to Captain Barbossa at the other.
2. It is helpful to account for all occurrences of the definite or indefinite article: e.g. logical use of the indefinite article (*a table*) in the first sentence but definite article (*the table*) in the subsequent two sentences.
3. An arbitrary list of nouns like *bread, fruit, and meat* can be memorized more easily through use of a convenient acronym (BFM), from which a more memorable "backronym" can also be created as a mnemonic aid: something syntactically meaningful (e.g. *Barbossa's food mountain*) or more specific and detailed (e.g. *baguettes, figs, and mutton*).
4. Sentences can be reduced to the most easily memorized concrete core words (in this case: 1. *sat, table, ship*; 2. *a-lot-of, food, table*; 3. *sat, end, table*), creating a framework that allows prepositions, articles, and other less concrete words to be logically filled in.

One type of structural pattern (discussed in the original analysis) consists of two similar words, constructions, or sentences with something different in between, appropriately labelled a "sandwich." In Section 1, there is a symmetry between sentences 1 and 3 (NAME *sat at . . . table*), with one sentence in between that involves *things* instead of people, resulting in a sentence sandwich: two similar, parallel pieces of "bread" with something different sandwiched between them.

A connection must now be found or forged between the preceding section and the next section of the text, the theme of which is Elizabeth eating and drinking. The scene has been set, with a great quantity of food on the table, so eating is the next logical step, and with eating comes drinking. Always keeping in mind the purpose of the scene and each section in it, as well as the motivation of the actors, supplies a momentum that propels the scene naturally forward. The eating/drinking scene is vital in order to move on to the real purpose of the scene, namely the explanation of the gold and the curse. As with theater acting, cultivating a feeling of *urgency* to move on to what comes next, driven by the purpose of the scene, leads to mental and emotional *anticipation* of the next section(s), which is likely to assist recall. Barbossa is playing the "host" to this

unwilling "guest," so naturally it is he that offers the food to Elizabeth. A successful transition has now been made to the second section of the text (below), which we notice has six sentences, twice as many as the first section. Moreover, there is one especially long sentence (the fourth) and two extremely short sentences consisting of only two words each, whereas the three sentences of the first section were all of approximately equal length. Noticing details such as these is part of the purpose of a thorough analysis.

*SECTION 2: ELIZABETH EATS & DRINKS (6 sentences)*

["Are you hungry?"] [he said].

"Please eat."

Elizabeth was [very hungry].

She took [some bread and some meat] and [started to eat].

["Have a drink,"] said Barbossa.

Elizabeth drank.

The subject of the last sentence of the previous section is *Captain Barbossa*, so it is only natural to replace that with *he* in the next sentence, and *he/she said* is one of the most common lexical chunks in "reported" dialogue such as this. Barbossa could begin by immediately offering the food to Elizabeth, but using the formulaic sequence *Are you hungry?* is equally natural. Here again there is symmetry in the form of a sandwich, since the word *hungry* appears in both the first and third sentences. There is also a complementary type of symmetry in this question/answer relationship: Is she hungry? Yes, she's hungry. (And not just hungry, but *very* hungry!) Barbossa's command/invitation appears in the middle of the sandwich, so it should be noticed that he finishes his utterance before the focus switches to Elizabeth and her reaction. There is also another type of sandwich here (" . . . , " *he said*. " . . . "), which of course is exceedingly common in reported dialogue: spoken lines in quotes with *he/she said* between them. The next sentence is easy to memorize if one combines imagination and visualization with the notion of motivation from theater acting. Rather than merely memorizing the words, the key is to mentally put oneself in Elizabeth's position (like an actor) and vividly *imagine* how hungry she is, conjuring up the actual physical sensation of extreme hunger. In fact, as with actors playing a scene, it can be helpful to *begin the entire text*

(both when memorizing and recalling) with the thought and feeling already firmly in mind that Elizabeth is ravenously hungry. (In the film Elizabeth grabs the food quite roughly and stuffs it in her mouth.) Again, with imagination and motivation, the more detail the better. *Why* is Elizabeth so hungry? Answering this question leads one beyond merely imagining the sensation of hunger to the thought that perhaps Elizabeth hasn't eaten for a long time, having been taken prisoner by the pirates, and this can then be added to the imagined reality.

Having established that Elizabeth is hungry, the next logical step in the story is for her to eat. She is named in the preceding sentence, so there is a logical switch to the pronoun *she* in the next sentence. Her act of eating is divided into two steps: taking and eating. (Visualizing her roughly grabbing the food is an effective way to reinforce memory of the "taking" step.) Moreover, she does not simply "eat"; she logically *starts* to eat. Once again, there is symmetry in this sentence, in the form of an "and" sandwich (or perhaps more appropriately, an "and-wich"). In fact, there are two: a noun sandwich (*some X **and** some Y*) and a clause sandwich (*took . . . **and** started . . .*). They can be represented visually thus:

She [took [some bread **and** some meat] **and** [started to eat]].

There is particular symmetry in the noun sandwich, with the repeated use of *some*. (It must logically be *some* rather than *the*, of course, since Elizabeth does not take all of the bread and meat, and the indefinite article is not an option with uncountable nouns.) Finally, *what* does Elizabeth take and eat? The first and last item in the earlier list, in that order. She apparently does not want any fruit, so this fact can also be added to the imagined reality along with appropriate exaggerated detail: perhaps she notices that the fruit is horribly, sickeningly overripe or covered with flies. Perhaps she takes the bread and meat in order to make a sandwich (to which fruit would not normally be added), in which case it makes logical sense for *bread* to occur before *meat* in the sentence, since a sandwich begins with bread, upon which the meat or other filling is then placed. Another built-in mnemonic hint is that the monosyllables *bread* and *meat* share the same orthographic diphthong (*ea*), in contrast to *fruit*. In addition, there is a serendipitous



rhyme (*meat/eat*) in the sentence, providing an excellent built-in mnemonic. Finally, regular rhythm makes memorization of lines much easier, and the meter of the sentence is almost perfect anapestic tetrameter, with the rhyming words (in bold below) falling exactly where they traditionally would in verse of such type. (Stressed syllables are capitalized).

took some BREAD and some **MEAT** and START-ed to **EAT**  
 de-de-DUM            de-de-DUM    de-DUM de-de-DUM

Elizabeth is now eating, so the next logical step is to offer her a drink to wash the food down, and Barbosa appropriately obliges with another extremely common formulaic utterance: *Have a drink*. The name *Barbosa* is logically reiterated here (rather than using a pronoun), because the narration had shifted to Elizabeth. It is also abbreviated to just *Barbosa*, as in every case from here onward; the name *Captain Barbosa* (having been established) is not used again in its entirety for the remainder of the scene. The offer/response symmetry of the final two sentences (*drink* : *drank*) echoes the question/answer symmetry involving the word *hungry* in the first and third sentences. Also of note here is a distinct *lack* of symmetry, namely the extreme brevity of the *drink/drank* exchange in contrast to the portion dealing with eating, which is much longer. As an aid to memory, the drinking portion could be viewed as merely an afterthought, a small "tail" attached to the main eating scene. As with *Barbosa* earlier, the name *Elizabeth* is logically reiterated here, since *Barbosa* is the subject of the preceding sentence. This logical accounting for each and every detail in performing an analysis of this nature serves to relieve as much of the burden on the memory as possible. The more one can rely on logical deductions and natural conclusions, the less there is to memorize. This is why it is crucial to *create* logical, natural connections where none already exist. One of the greatest challenges is remembering arbitrary details such as the order of utterances like *said Barbosa* (as opposed to *Barbosa said*), but fortunately it is not necessarily crucial to remember the exact order of sequences like this, since both orders are equally acceptable.

Reducing the six sentences to only core words makes the overall structure even

more apparent. (Semicolons are used in order to separate core words not from the same sentence but placed on the same line in order to make the symmetry more obvious.)

hungry; eat; hungry

bread & meat, eat

drink; drank

It can be helpful to notice how each sentence begins, and in this case it reveals an interesting type of symmetry. The first and fourth sentences consist of a question and statement, respectively, and both contain pronouns. Sentences 2 and 5 are both commands/invitations, and sentences 3 and 6 both begin with the same name. Displaying the questions with staggered indentation makes this even more apparent:

"Are you . . .

"Please . . .

Elizabeth . . .

She took . . .

"Have . . .

Elizabeth . . .

A link must now be established between the last sentence (*Elizabeth drank*) and the beginning of the next section, which begins with Elizabeth suddenly looking at Barbossa. As always, planting firmly in mind the purpose of this part of the scene, as well as the actors' motivation, will serve as a powerful prompt. The ultimate purpose of this section is to inform Elizabeth (and the audience) that Barbossa is unable to eat, but suspense is created by the fact that we still don't know *why*. As far as the actors' motivation, what leads up to Barbossa's revelation is Elizabeth's suspicion, aroused when she suddenly realizes that she is the only one eating. This establishes the necessary link: we can imagine Elizabeth taking a drink and suddenly wondering if Barbossa has put something in it to poison her, prompting her to look in his direction and verbally accost him. The sentence begins with the transition word *then*, which may require an extra bit of effort to remember, since it's not strictly necessary. Also, it is *the captain* this time rather than

*Captain Barbosa*, another arbitrary detail that may be difficult to remember, but as mentioned earlier, in cases such as this the precise wording is not absolutely essential. Even professional actors sometimes deviate from the script, even if only slightly.

*SECTION 3: BUT BARBOSSA CAN'T EAT (10 sentences)*

Then she [looked at] [the captain].

*["You're not eating!"]* [she said].

*["Is something wrong with] [the food]?*

*[Are you trying to] kill me?*

*[You eat it!"]*

She gave [the captain] [some bread], but he [didn't take it].

"I can't eat it," Barbosa said unhappily.

"[I'd like to].

[I'd love to].

But I can't."

At ten sentences, this is the longest section so far and accounts for approximately half of Elizabeth's lines, of which there are not many in the entire scene. Interestingly, *all* of her lines here consist of commonly used formulaic utterances: *You're not eating! Is something wrong with . . . ? Are you trying to . . . ? You eat it!* Moreover, all four sentences are logically connected: Barbosa not eating is suspicious, so . . . → the food may be poisoned, and . . . → it may even be deadly, so . . . → the captain should eat some to prove that it is safe. Her last line leads logically to the action of giving Barbosa some food, and bread is the most basic staple on the table. For the second time, it is *the captain* instead of *Barbosa*. In the entire scene, these are the only two sentences in which the captain appears in a sentence containing Elizabeth (*she*) as the grammatical subject, except for one later which uses only the pronoun *him*. As a memory aid, perhaps this could be viewed as reflecting Elizabeth's attitude here—one of suspicion and hostility, "depersonalizing" the captain, as opposed to using his actual name, which could be thought of as symbolic of greater intimacy. These are also the only two narrative sentences in this section and in both of them the action is directed from Elizabeth toward Barbosa. The second of the two sentences naturally pivots

on the connector *but*, appropriately shifting the grammatical subject to Barbossa, and this longest sentence of the section appears in the middle of a symmetrical command/response (*You eat it! I can't eat it . . .*) sandwich. Barbossa's verbal explanation (achieving the ultimate purpose of this part of the scene) follows logically from his rejection of the bread. The final three short sentences (each exactly three syllables) form a symmetrical sandwich with a natural syllabic rhythm. The emphasis of the middle sentence (*love* vs. *like*) raises the emotion to a higher pitch, and the final sentence dashes it back down again. There is also another symmetrical sandwich here, in Barbossa's lines: *can't, like-love, can't*. Of Barbossa's four lines, two are prefabricated chunks: *I'd like to. I'd love to.*

Next comes the turning point and transition to the ultimate purpose of the scene (Barbossa's explanation of the curse) and the longest section of all, with ten sentences, most of them long.

#### SECTION 4:

##### EXPLANATION OF GOLD & CURSE: THE "BAD NEWS" (10 sentences)

He took [the gold medallion] [from his coat].

"[This gold], [Miss Turner], is [very old].

[The Aztecs] [gave it to] Cortes    when he arrived [in the Americas].

[There are] [many, many more of] these.

And [the Aztecs] [put a curse on] them."

"We [found the gold] [on the *Isla de Muerta*]," said Barbossa.

"We took [all of it].

We bought [food and drink] [with it].

[But then, suddenly], [we couldn't eat] and [we couldn't drink].

When we [took the money], [Miss Turner], [the curse] [came with it]."

As discussed in the earlier article (Harris, 2015) it can be helpful to break up longer sections like this one into even smaller sections. Section 4 can neatly be divided in half, with the first five sentences discussing impersonal topics (the gold, Aztecs, and curse), and the last five sentences concerning the crew of the *Black Pearl* (more personal: the subject of each sentence is "we"). The first half provides general background information,

and the second half clarifies how the pirates are directly involved. Section 4 can even be further subdivided, into a total of five subsections:

1. The gold medallion (2 sentences)
2. Background information: origin of gold & curse (3 sentences)
3. Pirates find & take gold (2 sentences)
4. Pirates spend it (2 sentences)
5. Final sentence completes and clarifies the explanation: by taking the gold, the pirates are now cursed.

The first sentence of Section 4 provides no clues to facilitate a smooth transition from the previous section (*But I can't. → He took the gold medallion from his coat.*), so the connection must be supplied by the plot. Barbossa taking the medallion out is a moment of high drama, and cultivating a sense of urgency to get to this crucial point in the plot can serve to propel the mind forward. Far from hesitating at this point and wondering what comes next, we welcome this "moment we've all been waiting for" as a much-anticipated guest. One way to do this is to mentally visualize Barbossa's hand in his coat from the beginning of the scene, impatiently waiting to take out the medallion at just the right moment. Also, once Barbossa declares that he cannot eat, it is logical that he explain himself, and this is initiated with the concrete plot device of the medallion. (Obviously, *the* medallion has already been mentioned earlier in the story, hence the definite article.) It should also be noted that the first sentence is perfect iambic pentameter, so the rhythm can serve as a mnemonic aid:

he TOOK the GOLD me-DAL-lion FROM his COAT

With the exception of this first sentence, the entire remainder of the section consists solely of Barbossa speaking. In the second sentence, *gold/old* provides another serendipitous rhyme (the first one was *meat/eat* in Section 2), along with another catchy rhythm (almost perfect iambic tetrameter):

this **GOLD**, miss TUR-ner is VER-y **OLD**.

Section 4 has an abundance of formulaic language, including the following six prefabricated chunks:

*many, many more*

*put a curse on X*

*all of it*

*food and drink*

*But then, suddenly . . .*

*X came with it*

There are also several proper nouns in this section: *Aztecs*, *Cortes*, *Isla de Muerta*. The latter is a barbarism of the actual Spanish *Isla de la Muerte*, or "Island of Death." *Isla* is of course cognate with English *isle* and *island*, and *muerta* (more correctly *muerte*) can likewise be remembered through association with its English cognates: mortal, mortician, mortuary, etc. Useful collocations that learners could memorize in conjunction with this text are *mortal wound* and *mortality rate*.

In addition to an abundance of formulaic language, Section 4 contains a profusion of symmetries and sandwiches. As mentioned earlier, the first half of the section (five sentences) discusses the gold, Aztecs, and curse, whereas the last half involves the crew of the *Black Pearl*, with *we* appearing as the subject of each sentence. Now, at the lexical level, we also notice the symmetry of the actual word *curse* being used in sentences number 5 and 10, the last sentence of each half, respectively. The first occurrence is naturally a *curse* and the second is the *curse*. Similarly, sentences 1 and 6 (the first sentence of each half) begin with *He took the gold . . .* and *We found the gold . . .*, respectively, even though the word *gold* refers to something different in each of the two sentences. Also, *said Barbossa* appears in only one place in the entire section: exactly at the beginning of the second half (sentence 6), appropriately enough, to remind the reader who is speaking.

Other symmetries and sandwiches are as follows:

1. In Barbosa's lines, *Miss Turner* comes exactly in the middle of both the first and last.
2. In sentences 3, 4, 5: ***Aztecs***; *many, many*; ***Aztecs***
3. Two "and-wiches": *food and drink* (also a common collocation);  
[*we couldn't eat*] and [*we couldn't drink*]  
These two sandwiches even mirror each other: *food/drink, eat/drink*
4. Sentence 3 begins and ends with *The Aztecs . . . . . the Americas*, both proper nouns beginning with "A," with yet another proper noun (*Cortes*) in the middle: ACA.
5. In sentences 3 and 5: *The Aztecs . . . Cortes . . .*; *The Aztecs . . . curse . . .* (Moreover, both *Cortes* and *curse* contain the consonants *c,r,s*.)
6. The block of text comprised of sentences 2, 3, 4 begins and ends: *This . . . . . these*.
7. Sentence 4 begins and ends: *There . . . . . these*.
8. Sentences 4 and 5 end with . . . *these*; . . . *them*.
9. Sentences 7 and 10 begin: *We took . . .*; *When we took . . .*
10. Two *when* clauses: of the two sentences in which they appear, *when* starts the second clause of the first (sentence 3) but the first clause of the second (sentence 10).

Other miscellaneous points of interest to be noticed include:

1. The sequence of references to the gold: *this gold, the gold, the money*
2. The pronoun *it* refers to the gold no less than four times:  
*gave it, took all of it, bought . . . with it, came with it*
3. A reference to the gold (or medallions) in every single sentence except number 9:  
*the gold medallion, this gold, it, these, them, the gold, it, it, the money*
4. Use of *we* in sentences 6-10 (mentioned earlier): *We found . . . We took . . . We bought . . . we couldn't . . . (When) we took . . .*

When linking the ten sentences together in memory, the chain of associations could be represented thus: medallion → gold, old → Aztecs → many, many more (medallions) → curse (on the medallions) → found (medallions/gold) → took all → bought food/drink → couldn't eat/drink → back to the curse again. The chain of associations could be explained in detail as follows:

- What makes the medallion special? It's made of very old gold.
- Where might old gold come from? The Spanish conquistadors wanted the Aztecs' gold.
- Would the entire Aztec civilization have had only one gold medallion? No, many more! Note the serendipitous alliteration in many, many more (medallions).
- So many medallions made the Spaniards greedy, so the Aztecs punished them with a curse.
- There is a less obvious link between this sentence and the next, so extra attention is necessary here, but as mentioned above, each half of Section 4 ends with explicit mention of the noun *curse* and begins with explicit mention of the noun *gold*, so this can serve as a reminder of the transition to the second half, which now shifts the focus to *we* (the pirates), and the first sentence of this half establishes the connection between the story of the Aztec gold and the crew of the *Black Pearl*: *We found the gold . . .*
- What logically follows finding the gold? Taking all of it, of course.
- What is the logical next step after taking gold (i.e. money)? Buying something with it!
- And what would pirates want to buy while on land? Food and drink.
- The next sentence parallels this structure: eat and drink. This is also a key sentence in that it finally resolves some of the suspense, explaining Barbossa's earlier comment that he couldn't eat, and the unexpected onset of the curse is reflected at the beginning of the sentence with the common narrative formulaic pattern *but then, suddenly*.
- Finally, as mentioned earlier, the last sentence completes and clarifies the explanation: by taking the gold, the pirates are now cursed.

This was the longest and arguably most challenging section, and as the fourth section of eight, the end of it marks the halfway point, so when practicing recall of the text, the learner can exult at this point in being on the "downhill stretch." On that note, less detail will be provided for the final four sections, and only specific points of interest will be noted, in addition to showing suggested word groupings in brackets, as usual.

#### SECTION 5: THE "GOOD NEWS" (7 sentences)

[The captain] suddenly [looked happier].



"[But now] we can [end the curse].

We [had to] find [all of the gold].

Then we [had to] [put it back] [on the island] and [give some blood].

[For ten years] we [looked for the gold] [on every ship] and [in every town] . . . "

"*[And now] you have [all of it]*," Elizabeth said.

"Yes. With [this gold medallion], we have [all of it]. [Thank you]."

There are fewer useful prefabricated chunks than in the last section, but *all of it* (also in Section 4) occurs twice, and *put it back* is a particularly common expression. This section, like the last, begins with one sentence of narration, and the rest is Barbosa speaking, with the exception of one line by Elizabeth. The curse serves as the connection between this section and the last, but this time the focus is on ending the curse by putting the gold back. It should be noted that sentence 4 is misleading: the past tense use of *had to* makes it sound like a fait accompli, which of course is not the case, since the pirates have not yet put the gold back or offered blood. A more accurate wording would be: *Now we have to* . . .

Points of interest:

1. Very symmetrical "and-wich" (with an iambic rhythm) in sentence 5: *[on every ship]* and *[in every town]*
2. Statement/response symmetry in sentences 6, 7: *you have all of it; we have all of it*
3. Same phrase used in two sentences in a row (3, 4): *we had to; Then we had to*
4. references to the gold in each of the last 5 sentences:  
*all of the gold; it; the gold; all of it; all of it*

SECTION 6:

*EXPLANATION OF WHY ELIZABETH WAS ABDUCTED (7 sentences)*

She thought [for a minute].

"*You [have everything], and [you're going to be] [free of the curse].*

*[So why am I here?]"*

"[There's one more thing.]

You're [Elizabeth Turner], [the daughter of] [the pirate Bill Turner].

He was [one of us], but [he isn't with us now].

We [have to have] [your blood]!"

Prefabricated utterances include: *So why am I here?*, *one of us*, and *There's one more thing*. The first sentence of this section cannot be predicted from the previous section, so it is helpful to imagine and anticipate the emotion here, namely Elizabeth's confusion, expressed in sentences 2 and 3. Also, for the third time in a row, the first sentence is narration, with the remaining sentences all dialogue, and this can serve as an additional mnemonic hint regarding sections 4, 5, and 6. Moreover, the narrative sentences in sections 4 and 5, respectively, describe Barbossa's actions, whereas in section 6 the narrative sentence refers to Elizabeth for the first time, so this can help in remembering how this section begins. Note that the sequence here (starting with the last sentence of the previous section) is: Barbossa speaking, narration regarding Elizabeth, and then Elizabeth herself speaking. There are two particular points of interest in this section:

1. Symmetry between sentences 4 and 6: *There's one . . .* ; *He was one . . .*
2. Symmetry in sentence 6: *one of us, with us* (especially since the word *one* begins with a "w" sound, like *with*)

#### SECTION 7: ACTION (9 sentences)

Elizabeth [didn't understand], but she was afraid.

[Her blood]?

She [jumped up] and [tried to run].

But Barbossa stood [in front of her].

She [took a knife] and [pushed it into him].

Then she [ran outside].

She [closed her eyes].

[Her blood]!

What could she do?

This section is completely different from the other seven. First, it is all action with no dialogue, and second, most of the lines are shorter, some of them extremely short, which

is certainly appropriate for dramatic action. Note that all of the action is performed by Elizabeth except in sentence 4. The beginning sentence also connects logically to the previous section, with Elizabeth's reaction a very natural one. Common formulaic sequences here include: *tried to run, in front of, ran outside, closed her eyes*. There is an interesting question/exclamation symmetry (*Her blood? Her blood!*) in, coincidentally, the second sentence and the second *from last* sentence. Finally, *closed her eyes* in this section forms a symmetrical pair with *opened her eyes* in the next section.

SECTION 8: THE BIG "REVEAL" (8 sentences)

She [opened her eyes] **and** [saw the pirates] [at work].

Then she [looked carefully].

They weren't men—they were skeletons!

Barbossa was [behind her].

**"Now, [Miss Turner], you can [really see us]."**

He smiled.

**"Yes, [Miss Turner], [we're all] ghosts."**

**You're [in a ghost story]!"**

The previous section ends with Elizabeth having run "outside" (i.e. onto the deck of the ship) with her eyes closed, so there is a natural transition to her opening her eyes and seeing the pirates at work on the deck. In this final section, the first half is described from Elizabeth's perspective, whereas the second half is Barbossa speaking, with the exception of the extremely short sentence number 6. The fourth sentence forms a symmetrical pair with a sentence in the previous section (coincidentally, also the fourth sentence of *that* section), with Barbossa first *in front of her*, and then *behind her*. The beginnings of sentences 5 (*Now, Miss Turner, you . . .*) and 7 (*Yes, Miss Turner, we're . . .*) also exhibit symmetry.

As the preceding detailed analysis demonstrates, memorization of text or dialogue for purposes of language acquisition need not be uncreative or boring. Analyzing and memorizing a text using both *imagination* and *logic* can enable learners to consciously notice linguistic features, thereby providing potential opportunities for acquiring those

features. This is particularly true of formulaic language, which plays such a crucial role in native-like competence and idiomaticity, as earlier discussed. In addition, it appears that prefabricated chunks may well play a significant role in the development of fluency. Indeed, Wood (2007) found that the use of formulaic sequences by Japanese learners of English as a foreign language contributed to spoken fluency. This accords with Skehan's view (1995) that learners use their memory-based systems to access and utilize language chunks, and that rapid retrieval of prefabricated sequences (which require minimal processing capacity) from memory as whole chunks enables fluency.

It is still unclear to what degree second language learners derive grammatical rules from prefabricated utterances, and more research is needed, but if rules are indeed abstracted from formulaic chunks as input, then there is a clear benefit to having more chunks stored in memory, in order to serve as raw data for processing. However, even if the issue of whether rules are derived is completely ignored, the importance of formulaic language is undisputed, and having more prefabricated sequences stored in memory is certainly advantageous for learners. Memorization of text and dialogue in a second language is one method for noticing these sequences through focused attention, and then storing that grammatically accurate, native-like formulaic language firmly in memory. Moreover, an additional advantage is that the formulaic chunks are memorized together with the meaningful context in which they appear. Text memorization, if done in an interesting and stimulating way, can provide an effective method for learners to actively store formulaic language in memory, thereby increasing native-like usage and fluency.

## Appendix

### Chapter 8: Dinner with Barbossa (60 sentences)

#### SECTION 1: SETTING THE SCENE (3 sentences)

Elizabeth sat at a table on the *Black Pearl*. There was a lot of food on the table—bread, fruit, and meat. Captain Barbossa sat at the other end of the table.

#### SECTION 2: ELIZABETH EATS & DRINKS (6 sentences)

"Are you hungry?" he said. "Please eat." Elizabeth was very hungry. She took some bread and some meat and started to eat. "Have a drink," said Barbossa. Elizabeth drank.

#### SECTION 3: BUT BARBOSSA CAN'T EAT (10 sentences)

Then she looked at the captain. "You're not eating!" she said. "Is something wrong with the food? Are you trying to kill me? You eat it!" She gave the captain some bread, but he didn't take it. "I can't eat it," Barbossa said unhappily. "I'd like to. I'd love to. But I can't."

#### SECTION 4:

##### EXPLANATION OF GOLD & CURSE: THE "BAD NEWS" (10 sentences)

He took the gold medallion from his coat. "This gold, Miss Turner, is very old. The Aztecs gave it to Cortes when he arrived in the Americas. There are many, many more of these. And the Aztecs put a curse on them." "We found the gold on the *Isla de Muerta*," said Barbossa. "We took all of it. We bought food and drink with it. But then, suddenly, we couldn't eat and we couldn't drink. When we took the money, Miss Turner, the curse came with it."

#### SECTION 5: THE "GOOD NEWS" (7 sentences)

The captain suddenly looked happier. "But now we can end the curse. We had to find all of the gold. Then we had to put it back on the island and give some blood. For ten years we looked for the gold on every ship and in every town . . ." "And now you have all of it," Elizabeth said. "Yes. With this gold medallion, we have all of it. Thank

you."

*SECTION 6: EXPLANATION OF WHY ELIZABETH WAS ABDUCTED (7 sentences)*

She thought for a minute. *"You have everything, and you're going to be free of the curse. So why am I here?"* "There's one more thing. You're Elizabeth Turner, the daughter of the pirate Bill Turner. He was one of us, but he isn't with us now. We have to have your blood!"

*SECTION 7: ACTION (9 sentences)*

Elizabeth didn't understand, but she was afraid. Her blood? She jumped up and tried to run. But Barbossa stood in front of her. She took a knife and pushed it into him. Then she ran outside. She closed her eyes. Her blood! What could she do?

*SECTION 8: THE BIG "REVEAL" (8 sentences)*

She opened her eyes and saw the pirates at work. Then she looked carefully. They weren't men—they were skeletons! Barbossa was behind her. "Now, Miss Turner, you can really see us." He smiled. "Yes, Miss Turner, we're all ghosts. You're in a ghost story!"

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