Formulaic language as regulatory mechanism in communication

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In this presentation I will lay out part of a theoretical model I have been developing recently. Its purpose is to address a major problem in our research: how can you identify and measure the formulaic language in a spoken or written text?

Rather than looking at text and wondering where the formulaicity starts and stops, I have been starting at the other end, by considering the purpose of communication, and what motivates formulaic language to appear in greater and lesser quantities. My working hypothesis is that the amount of formulaic language used is regulated by other elements, and that these elements are potentially more easily quantified.

To put it another way, is it the case that formulaic language (F) is in a particular relationship with something else (X) to generate a constant value (C)? If so, then by quantifying C and identifying and measuring X, we could in principle arrive at a value for F.

This is very much work in progress, and I will not be presenting complete answers, nor a means, yet, of quantifying formulaic language. Nor will I extend beyond the realms of spoken output, since the model needs a different set of calibrations for written texts.

However, it will be possible to consider the most likely candidates for X and C, and go some way towards seeing how X and C cause formulaic language to vary not only in quantity, but also form and function across different texts.