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Contextual accommodation of formulaic intertexts in English press stories

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Abstract: Formulaic expressions are prefabricated chunks of language ubiquitous in everyday discourse and hence constitute an important aspect of communicative competence. They are frequently adopted or adapted to evoke intertextual associations that disrupt or defamiliarize the automatized formulaic frame, as in *Home Smart Home*. Such disrupted or defamiliarized formulaic expressions are referred to in this article as “formulaic intertexts,” which is an interesting discursive feature that has gone largely unnoticed in the literature. This article aims to explore formulaic intertexts across English newspapers in different pragmatic contexts. A textual survey and analysis were conducted on 1,681 full-length news stories to probe into the formulaic intertexts across the following six newspapers in their respective macro contexts: the *China Post*, the *Gulf Daily News*, *The NY Times International Weekly*, *The New York Times*, the *Telegraph* (Calcutta), and the *Manchester Evening News*. The exploration reveals noticeable linguistic and contextual features associated with the occurrence of a formulaic intertext, such as the scale of the newspaper, its target audience, different types of formulaic expressions, and different textual units of a news story. The survey and analysis have shed some light on the affordance between formulaic intertexts and the pragmatic contexts of the news stories.

Keywords: formulaic intertexts, formulaic expressions, pragmatic contexts, English press news

1 Introduction

This article is concerned with allusive intertexts. An allusive intertext (e. g. *Home Smart Home*) refers indirectly to an earlier span of text (e. g. *Home, Sweet Home*), quoting or reflecting the earlier text in such a way that the reader can construct or infer the meaning of the present allusive intertext on the basis of the earlier

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text (Shie 2013). Both the allusive intertext (henceforth “the alluding text”) and the earlier alluded text (henceforth “the source text”) are a meaningful span of oral or written discourse, which can be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a coherent span of text. The alluding text is intelligible or appreciable to the reader in terms of the source text, which can be taken as a frame or cognitive structure that guides the representation or perception of the alluding text.

This article also involves formulaic expressions. They are conventionalized word strings believed to be stored and retrieved holistically from memory rather than generated via lexicogrammatical rules (cf. Kecskes 2007: 193; Lin 2012: 342; Wray 2002: 9; Wray and Perkins 2000: 1). It can be seen from the examples of formulaic expressions given in the literature (e. g. Biber et al. 1999; Burdelski and Cook 2012; Kecskes 2007; Kecskes 2014; Overstreet and Yule 2001; Siyanova-Chanturia et al. 2011; Van Lancker Sittis and Rallon 2004; Zyzik 2011) that formulaic language is a very inclusive umbrella term for a range of multi-word units, including idioms (e. g. *shoot the breeze*), slang phrases (e. g. *act like jeans and fade*), proverbs (e. g. *Look before you leap*), sayings (e. g. *Tomorrow’s another day.*), slogans (e. g. *Just do it!*), catchphrases (e. g. *mission impossible*),¹ expletives (e. g. *mother fucker*), binomials (e. g. *friend or foe*), clichés (e. g. *easier said than done*), and fixed expressions (e. g. *as a matter of fact*).² An allusive intertext built upon a formulaic expression may be designated as a “formulaic intertext,” as in the following news headline: “From Elephants’ Mouths, an Illicit Trail to China,”³ with the idiom *from the horse’s mouth* as the source text. The news story thus headlined depicts the thriving ivory business that transports elephant tusks from Africa to China. The concept of adapted formulaic expressions as an allusive intertext will be developed in the following section.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the contextual accommodation of formulaic intertexts in English press stories. The data are drawn from 1,681 full-length news stories of the following six English newspapers: the *China Post*, the *Gulf Daily News*, *The NY Times International Weekly*, *The New York Times*, the *Telegraph* (Calcutta Edition), and the *Manchester Evening News*. A textual survey and analysis were conducted on the 1,681 news stories to probe into the formulaic intertexts across the six newspapers in their respective news contexts.

¹ This example appears in *The Oxford Dictionary of Catchphrases*, edited by Anna Farkas (2002: 223).

² Slang phrases may be viewed as a subset of idioms that are more restricted in their social status and distribution. Sayings could be a kind of proverbs (cf. OED Online: s.v. *saying*). Furthermore, both proverbs and sayings can be considered as sentential idioms (as in Liu 2007: 23).

³ The headline of a news story in *The New York Times* published on 1 March 2013 (available at <http://www.nytimes.com/>).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section is a brief literature survey to establish the theoretical basis for exploring formulaic intertexts. Section 3 presents the data and methodological considerations. Section 4 summarizes the findings, analyzes the intertextual categories, and interprets the distributional characteristics of formulaic intertexts across different newspapers. And the last section is the conclusion.

2 Formulaic adaptation and formulaic intertexts

Formulaic expressions are prefabricated. But many of them are not altogether opaque or unanalyzable. Their component parts are not always inflexible or invariant. Most categories of formulaic expressions – including idioms, slang phrases, proverbs, sayings, slogans, expletives, speech formulas, binominals, clichés, and fixed expressions – can be creatively adapted to a new context or purpose to yield a formulaic variant (e. g. *I didn't spill a single bean* and *by and not-so-large*).⁴ It has been found that many idioms are analyzable and allow of lexical or semantic modification (Langlotz 2006; McGlone et al. 1994; Nunberg et al. 1994). Examining thousands of fixed expressions and idioms in his 18 million word corpus, Moon (1998) finds out that almost 40 % of English fixed expressions and idioms allow lexical variation or transformation. Granted that formulaic adaptation is common, formulaic variants are rarely found in phraseological dictionaries since they are not institutionalized (Moon 2008; Vrbinc and Vrbinc 2011).

The most frequent type of formulaic adaptation is addition. Formulaic expressions are most often adapted to a new context or purpose by adding one or more elements to the default form (cf. Vrbinc and Vrbinc 2011), as in *leave no legal stone unturned*. Other notable types of adaptation, as Džanić (2007) has noted, include clipping (as in *there were too many cooks*), substitution (as in *born with a plastic spoon in his mouth*), formal blending (as in *cook the goose that lays the golden egg*), permutation (as in *never do today what you can put off for tomorrow*), and reconstruction (the original and variant share the same lexical composition but differ in structure, as in *he had more bark than bite*). Still others are identified by Brinton and Akimoto (1999: 9): negation (as in *spill no beans*), quantification (as in *touch a couple of nerves*), passivization (as

⁴ The variant *by and not-so-large* may express disagreement with a generalization (Glucksberg 2001: 83).

in *the decks were cleared*), topicalization (as in *his closets, you might find skeletons in*), and nominalization (as in *the running of the gauntlet*).

As I see it, formulaic adaptations can be treated as a type of allusive intertexts (hence the name “formulaic intertexts”), built upon an alluding text to be processed and an earlier source text to be evoked. Thus, as noted earlier, the *NYT* headline “From Elephants’ Mouths, an Illicit Trail to China” is an alluding text that can evoke the source text *from the horse’s mouth*. An allusive intertext, including a formulaic intertext, is a situated speech act. The activation or evocation of an allusive source text can be viewed as the realization of a perlocutionary act, which, according to Austin (1962: 101), produces “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience.” An allusive intertext, of which a formulaic intertext is a type, has a perlocutionary act potential. Such an intertext is a wordplay or a language game that can catch the reader’s attention and arouse their interest better than a straightforward expression. The source text is something the reader calls to mind at the time of reading. The reader needs to activate the knowledge about the source text and uses it as a frame to infer the meaning of the alluding text and/or perceive the intertextual entertainment. The readers who activate the source text and comprehend or appreciate the alluding text are positively disposed toward the text (cf. Irwin 2002) and drawn further into the reading matter. When this happens, the reader’s affinity with the text is generated or enhanced as a consequential effect.

A formulaic intertext can be used to perform what Mey (2001) terms a “pragmatic act.” In the situational context of a news headline or lead, the occurrence of a formulaic intertext represents a “pract” to realize the generalized pragmatic act (or the “pragmeme”) of inviting in situational use, namely to tickle the reader’s fancy and draw the reader into the body copy. It is well known that to get attention and to draw the reader into the body copy are two major functions of a news headline (cf. Bly 2005). A feature headline that sells the news story or pitches the story’s appeal expresses a pragmatic act of inviting, as is the case with the following advertising text that appeals to the reader by its semantic clash: “I brought some sushi home and cooked it; it wasn’t bad,” which is treated in Mey (2001: 207–208) as a “pragmatic act of inviting.” A feature headline pitches the story’s appeal via rhyming words, adapted idioms, punning words, metaphors, metonymies, and the like (cf. Friend and Challenger 2014; Rao 2012; Shams 2013; Shie 2011a, Shie 2011b), all of which can be conceptualized as a device to produce individual pragmatic acts that substantiate or realize the particular pragmeme of inviting the reader to read the body copy in the situated sociocultural context of newspaper reading.

The meaning of an alluding text is both intra-textual and extra-textual in the sense that it is hidden between the intra-textual alluding text and extra-textual source texts. The alluding text needs to be processed or decoded, in conjunction with activation of the source text, to pragmatically infer the overall intertextual meaning or to stylistically arrive at the intertextual significance. The alluding text is quoted or adapted from the source text. Parallels between the two texts trigger the process of inferring the meaning and significance of the implicit intertextuality. Identicalness or similarity in phrasing, structure, or even prosody between the alluding texts and the source texts activates the reader's awareness of and draws the reader's attention to the allusive intertext in question. The following description is proposed to account for the processing of allusive intertexts, including formulaic intertexts and idiom variants:

1. The alluding text evokes its identicalness with or resemblance to the source text in terms of phrasing, structure, or prosody.
2. The source text comes to the reader's notice.
3. In light of its textual, situational, and sociocultural contexts, the alluding text is recognized as a formal or semantic variant of the source text.
4. The meaning of the source text is retrieved.
5. The meanings and/or significance of the different constituents (if any) between the alluding text and the source text are perceived.
6. The association between the alluding text and the source text is constructed.
7. On the basis of the intertextual association and the knowledge about the source text, the pragmatic meaning of the alluding text is inferred or its stylistic significance achieved.

This step-by-step account can be viewed as a tentative abstraction of the intricate processing of an allusive intertext that may occur automatically in reading, containing variables or qualities of the actual processing which are too complicated to be captured by words in a fully accurate way at the present stage. But further empirical research can be conducted to test the assumption or to guide necessary modification.

As noted earlier, formulaic intertexts are treated in this study as a subset of allusive intertexts defined or characterized in the beginning of the present paper. Other prominent categories of allusive intertexts include literary intertexts (based on a source text from a literary work) and media intertexts (grounded in a source text from a media product). An example of a literary intertext is "Volumes to Go Before You Die," the headline of a *NYT* news story on 23 May 2008 that introduces a book review of *1001 Books You Must Read Before*

You Die (cited in Shie 2011b: 54), namely a literary reference book compiled by over one hundred literary critics worldwide. The intertextual source text is the last line of the well-known Robert Frost poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”: *And miles to go before I sleep*. In addition, an example of a media intertext is “Who’s That Girl?” the headline of a *NYT* news story on 17 July 2008 that deals with Madonna’s latest stylistic reinvention at the time of the news report (cited in Shie 2011b: 52). The source text (identical with the alluding text *Who’s That Girl?*) is the title of a well-known Madonna song.

3 Data and methodology

The data for the present study comprise the news stories in six English newspapers in their respective pragmatic contexts published during the four consecutive months ending on 31 October 2012, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sources of data and their pragmatic contexts.

Newspaper	Pragmatic context
The <i>China Post</i> (CP)	EFL in Taiwan (expanding circle)
The <i>Gulf Daily News</i> (GDN)	EFL in Bahrain (expanding circle)
The <i>NY Times International Weekly</i> (IW)	EIL that leans toward ESL or EFL (outer/expanding circle)
The <i>New York Times</i> (NYT)	ENL in the United States/EIL (inner, outer, and expanding circles)
The <i>Telegraph</i> (Calcutta) (TT)	EOL in India (outer circle)
The <i>Manchester Evening News</i> (MEN)	ENL in Britain (inner circle)

Note: EFL = English as a foreign language; EIL = English as an international Language; ESL = English as a second language; ENL = English as a native language; EOL = English as an official language.

The pragmatic context of each of the six newspapers is identified in light of Kachru’s three concentric circles of world Englishes (Kachru 1985), which categorizes the sociolinguistic aspects of Englishes into inner, outer, and expanding circles in their international contexts. The inner circle (including the United States and the United Kingdom) constitutes the traditional bases of English, where it is used as a native language. The outer circle comprises regions such as India and Nigeria, where English is used as an official language due to extended periods of colonization by the inner circle countries. The geographical regions

characterized as the expanding circle include countries such as China and Japan, where English is used as a foreign or international language.

The sociolinguistic backgrounds of the six newspapers are summarized below. The *China Post* (CP) was established in 1952 as the first English newspaper in Taiwan, where English is used as a foreign language.⁵ Founded in 1978, the *Gulf Daily News* (GDN) is the predominant English newspaper in Bahrain, which belongs to the expanding circle.⁶ *The NY Times International Weekly* (IW) is a *New York Times* (NYT) supplement reaching a global audience. Each IW news story corresponds to a NYT news story in the sense that the former is edited from the latter and hence covers the same story content as the latter does (Shie 2012). The weekly is distributed as a stand-alone section within 35 newspapers in 27 countries across Europe, Latin America, and Asia, reaching more than 6 million readers each week.⁷ Prepared by *New York Times* editors and designers from recent *New York Times* news items largely for a global non-native English speaking audience, the pragmatic context of the weekly can be considered as that of EIL (English as an International Language) leaning toward ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language), with most of the target readers in the outer or expanding circle. Winner of 106 Pulitzer Prizes, *The New York Times* has the largest circulation of any seven-day newspaper in the United States, with reporting bureaus throughout the United States and in 26 foreign countries (*The New York Times* and Grimes 2013, back endpapers). As a highly internationalized newspaper, *The New York Times* is read in pragmatic contexts ranging from ENL (English as a Native Language, as in the United States), through ESL (as in India and Nigeria), to EFL (as in Sweden and Taiwan). *The New York Times* can be thought of as a newspaper in the context of EIL, as well as ENL by virtue of its native-English-speaking copyeditors and American readers. Launched in 1982 and published from Calcutta, the *Telegraph* (TT) is the largest circulated English daily in Eastern India,⁸ with a readership of over 1,200,000 according to Indian Readership Survey 2012.⁹ Thus the news context is that of English as an official language in the outer circle. Finally, the *Manchester Evening News* (MEN) is a

5 The *China Post* is claimed to be the largest English media in Taiwan, whose news website has over 300,000 hits (website views) a day. See: <http://www.web66.com.tw/ch/61/CW4/Blog/4269.html> (accessed 10 March 2014) and <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/cp/thechinapost/> (accessed 10 March 2014).

6 The *Gulf Daily News* has an Arabic sister newspaper with which it shares news content (Gardner 2010).

7 See <http://nytimeweekly.com/> (accessed 10 March 2014) and Shie (2012).

8 See <http://www.telegraphindia.com/section/others/aboutus.jsp> (accessed 10 March 2014).

9 See <http://mruc.net/images/irs2012q2-topline-findings.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2014).

regional daily newspaper covering Greater Manchester in the United Kingdom. It has an average daily circulation of 74,702 copies in print (66.80 % paid) during the period from 2 July 2012 to 30 December 2012.¹⁰ It is obvious that the *Manchester Evening News* is a newspaper in an ENL context within the inner circle.

A textual survey and stylistic analysis were conducted to probe into the contextual accommodation of formulaic intertexts in the news stories drawn from the six newspapers according to the following two considerations:

1. The formulaic intertexts should be collected systematically from the news stories published in the same period of time (i.e. the four consecutive months ending on 31 October 2012).
2. The closest possible number of news stories should be taken from each of the six newspapers so that the occurrence frequencies of adapted formulaic sequences in each of them can later be compared on the closest possible basis.

The number of news stories gathered from each of the newspapers are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of news stories drawn from each of the six newspapers.

Newspaper	<i>CP</i>	<i>GDN</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>NYT</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>MEN</i>	Total
News stories drawn	264	296	286	286	269	280	1,681

A total of 1,681 full-length news stories were collected for the present study in the following ways. First, all (264) the Top Stories news items by the *China Post* news staff (rather than from a wire agency) during the four-month period were gathered from the *CP* website (www.chinapost.com.tw), all of which were national news. Second, all (296) news stories in the Local News section of the *Gulf Daily News* published during July and August 2012 were obtained from the *GDN* website (www.gulf-daily-news.com/archivehome.aspx). The digital editions of the *GDN* news items published during September and October 2012 were not available.¹¹ Third, all (286) *IW* news stories were collected which were published in Taiwan in print form during the same four-month period. Fourth, all (286) *NYT* news stories

¹⁰ See its circulation certificate available at <http://www.abc.org.uk/Certificates/18358472.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2014).

¹¹ The present author has asked the *GDN* twice for the digital editions but received no responses.

corresponding to their *IW* counterparts were retrieved from *The New York Times* Article Archive on the website of *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com) in the following steps: (i) the *IW* stories were collected from the *IW* pullouts in the print newspaper; (ii) each *IW* story was read in its entirety; (iii) searches were performed on the *NYT* search engine through specific search terms, such as the full name of a non-famous person or an organization that appeared in the *IW* story; (iv) the corresponding *NYT* news stories were found in the *NYT* archive online; and (v) all pairs of corresponding *IW* and *NYT* news stories were converted into electronic files for convenience of textual survey and analysis. Fifth, accessed from the *Telegraph* (Calcutta) website (www.telegraphindia.com/archives/archive.html) were all (269) news stories in the *TT* Front Page section and Nation section published on Sundays during the same four-month period. Finally, the first seven news stories by each of the ten *MEN* news writers in each month during the four-month period were acquired from the *MEN* website (www.manchesterevening-news.co.uk), yielding a total of 280 *MEN* news stories.

The formulaic intertexts were identified from the 1,681 full-length news stories (henceforth “the database”) by three academics at a university in Taiwan (including the present author) according to the characterization of formulaic intertexts in this paper. One of them is a native speaker of British English, and the other two non-native English speakers are employed as EFL professionals. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*,¹² *The Phrase Finder*,¹³ and *TheFreeDictionary*¹⁴ jointly served as a frame of reference for the two EFL professionals to check their identifications of and intuition about relevant formulaic sequences in the database. All the formulaic intertexts identified were further reviewed and categorized by the present author using, among others, the three above-mentioned online resources. Disagreements about the identified formulaic intertexts were mediated until all three readers agreed. Cases where no agreement could be reached were left out.

4 Results and discussion

A total of 118 formulaic intertexts were identified from the database. Their source texts fall into five categories: idioms, proverbs, slogans/catchphrases, situation-

¹² Cf. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

¹³ Cf. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/>

¹⁴ *TheFreeDictionary* is a multi-source online dictionary and encyclopedia with an idiom component. Cf. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>

bound utterances (SUBs), and other fixed expressions. Their occurrence frequencies are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of formulaic intertexts across the six newspapers.

	<i>GDN</i>	<i>CP</i>	<i>MEN</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>NYT</i>	Total
Idiom	4	1	14	21	7	24	71
Proverb	0	1	0	8	4	7	20
Slogan/catchphrase	0	0	3	3	0	1	7
SBUs	0	0	1	0	1	2	4
Other fixed expr.	0	2	3	2	3	6	16
Total	4	4	21	34	15	40	118
Percent	3.4	3.4	17.8	28.8	12.7	33.9	100
<i>n</i>	296	264	280	269	286	286	1,681

Note: *n* = total number of sampled news articles from which the formulaic intertexts are identified.

The 118 intertexts do not include formulaic adaptations motivated purely by grammatical features, such as tense, number, case, and person. All the 118 intertexts are pragmatically and stylistically motivated accommodations of formulaic expressions in their situated use. They defamiliarize a conventionalized form to create the pragmatic act of inviting the reader to read on and carry out the perlocutionary force.

As shown in Table 3, the most used and preferred types of formulaic intertexts in the database are idioms (71 out of 112) and proverbs (20 out of 112). An idiom is “a stable word combination with a fully or partially transferred meaning” (Veisbergs 1997: 156). Proverbs, slogans, and catchphrases are categories of formulaic expressions parallel to idioms on the grounds that their upper structural limit are the sentence and that they behave similarly when undergoing contextually determined accommodations (Veisbergs 1997: 156), as in “Frankly, it’s a state which sows what it reaps” (*TT*, 8 July 2012, Front Page). Formulaicity or idiomaticity is best conceived of as a continuum (cf. Kecskes 2014; Vega Moreno 1993; Wulff 2008). In light of Kecskes’s (2014) functional continuum, idioms and proverbs can be placed on the right extreme because of their highest psychological saliency¹⁵ and the widest gaps between their compositional and situational meanings. As the two largest categories of the sources of formulaic intertexts in the database, idioms and proverbs jointly account for

¹⁵ Kecskes (2014: 109) proposes to distinguish between formulaic sequences that have psychological saliency for speakers of the language community and loosely tied word sequences that occur frequently, such as *if they want*, *this shows that*, *and of the*, and so on.

81.3% of the intertextual sources (91 out of 118). Their high psychological saliency and/or semantic opacity are conducive to the pragmatic act of catching the reader's attention.

Situation-bound utterances (SUBs) are highly conventionalized formulaic sequences or pragmatic units occurring in standardized communicative situations, such as *welcome aboard* and *help yourself*. SUBs also have high psychological saliency (cf. Kecskes 2003, Kecskes 2007; Kecskes 2010; Kecskes 2014). But there are only four instances of the adapted use of SUBs in new situations: *your highness* (twice), *pull up a couch*, and *trick-or-treating*. The conventional meanings of SUBs are used in predictable situations. The contextual predictability limits SUBs' pragmatic or stylistic adaptations in new situations. In addition, 16 instances of formulaic intertexts were found in the database to be adapted from other fixed expressions. According to the frame of reference mentioned above, these fixed expressions do not fit into the category of idioms, proverbs, or slogans/catchphrases. They are not SUBs either. But they were felt to be adapted from more or less conventionalized word strings, as in "The Competitor in Chief,"¹⁶ "A missing piece in the Indian political jigsaw,"¹⁷ and "Commons front as MPs unite to demand war on child poverty."¹⁸

It is also noticeable that some formulaic intertexts in the database involve double actualization of the literal meaning and idiomatic meaning of an idiom or proverb. The following is an example: "Ma goes from head of state to head of the pack in 400m walk" (*CP* headline, 9 September 2012), where Ma refers to Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou. This *CP* news story reports that President Ma beat all other heavyweights from his administration to win the 400-meter walk at the central government sports day in Taipei. The headline's pragmatic act or its pragmatic force may be effectuated optimally when the reader invokes both literal and idiomatic meanings of the idiom *ahead of the pack*. Sometimes, the activation of the literal or compositional meaning (rather than idiomatic or figurative meaning) of a formulaic sequence can pitch the story's appeal and facilitate the realization of the particular pragmeme of inviting the reader to read the body copy. Consider the following example: "Beggars can't be choosers – not even when it comes to quitting" (*TT* lead, 15 July 2012, *Nation*). The news story describes the India government's plan to collect the fingerprints of the country's estimated 7.3 lakh beggars for a national database to launch a rehabilitation package for beggars. The salient meaning (or the most conventional,

¹⁶ *NYT* headline, 19 June 2012. The *NYT* news story is corresponding to an *IW* story published on 11 September 2012.

¹⁷ *TT* body copy, 21 October 2012, Front Page.

¹⁸ *MEN* headline, 25 September 2012.

frequent, familiar, or prototypical interpretation; see Kecskes 2006) of the proverbial phrase in the lead (namely “people who depend on others’ generosity should not dictate or question what they are given”) may be invoked at first glance; however, by the time the reader arrives at the lead, the literal interpretation is constructed to fit the situation of the news story when that situation is brought to bear on what can be meant by the proverbial expression in the lead.

Turning next to the occurrence frequencies of formulaic intertexts across the six newspapers: Altogether 118 instances of formulaic intertexts were identified from the database comprising 1,681 news stories. Table 3 shows the number of the five types of formulaic intertexts in the database. Especially noticeable is the relatively low occurrence of formulaic intertexts involving non-native English readers. In the news stories of either *GDN* or *CP*, each of which exists in an EFL context in the expanding circle, only four instances of formulaic intertexts were found out of the 118 in the database, which is only 3.4 %. This corresponds to Kecskes’s (2014: 115) finding that “[n]onnative speakers appear to rely on pre-fabricated expressions in their lingua franca language production to a much smaller extent than native speakers.” Non-native English speakers tend to stick to literal or semantically transparent language production, which helps avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. The *GDN* and *CP* stories in the database were prepared in a highly consistent pattern of straight news style to fit into the needs of non-native English readers. Accordingly, adapted pre-fabricated expressions or formulaic intertexts are rare in these print stories.

Altogether, it was found that formulaic intertexts occur most frequently in *NYT* news (33.9 %), followed by *TT* (28.8 %), *MEN* (17.8 %), and *IW* (12.7 %), while those in *GDN* and *CP* news are both rare, as noted earlier, each accounting for only 4 %. The occurrence frequencies reflect different degrees of affordance of the respective pragmatic contexts in which the news stories are embedded. As Capone (2010: 2865) puts it, “[s]tories are social activities which are embedded in a situation of utterance and thus are sensitive to parameters from those situations.” Macro features of the situational context in which the news is constructed and consumed interact with the use of formulaic intertexts in the news stories. Table 4 notes the rank order of the six newspapers in terms of the occurrence frequencies of formulaic intertexts.

The rank order given in Table 4 preliminarily indicates that the most favorable or conducive macro news context for formulaic intertexts is a national newspaper targeted at ENL speakers, followed by those targeted at EOL (English as an Official Language) and EIL speakers, while English newspapers in an EFL context are the least viable contexts for formulaic intertexts. Granted that the *MEN* is for English native speakers, it is a regional newspaper that carries straight, plain-style news stories giving the facts of the news in Greater

Table 4: Rank order of the six newspapers by frequencies of formulaic intertexts.

News	Pragmatic context	Freq.	Rank
<i>NYT</i>	ENL in United States/EIL (inner, outer, and expanding circles)	40 (33.9 %)	1
<i>TT</i>	EOL in India (outer circle)	34 (28.8 %)	2
<i>MEN</i>	ENL in Britain (inner circle)	21 (17.8 %)	3
<i>IW</i>	EIL that leans toward ESL/EFL (outer/expanding circle)	15 (12.7 %)	4
<i>CP</i>	EFL in Taiwan (expanding circle)	4 (04.0 %)	5
<i>GDN</i>	EFL in Bahrain (expanding circle)	4 (04.0 %)	5

Manchester. The reader can usually extract the meanings of an *MEN* story through linguistic knowledge, relevant common or universal knowledge, and knowledge directly connected with the actual situation without particularly complex intertextual inference. Thus in *MEN* stories, formulaic intertexts (realizing the pragmatic act of grabbing the reader’s attention and promoting most especially a feature story) do not occur as frequently as in *NYT* stories, which demonstrates the use of language in a less forthright manner but more vividly and impressively not just to inform but to motivate or sometimes even to entertain the reader. Admittedly, further investigations can be conducted to verify these assumptions or interpretations. The most notable contextual feature or variable of formulaic intertexts in news stories should be their readers, which the following discussion will address.

Formulaic intertexts occur more frequently in one macro context of English press stories than another. The question is, why? And what does the variation in occurrence frequency tell us about the use of English across different press news contexts? In the database, most formulaic intertexts appear where the target audience is ENL or EOL speakers. The wider the gap between the compositional meaning and the actual situational meaning of a formulaic expression, the more challenging it will be for a non-native speaker to comprehend its actual context of use. There are three reasons for this. First, literal or compositional meanings of expressions are more salient to non-native English speakers. As Kecskes (2007) remarks:

[N]on-native speakers use the linguistic code itself as a common ground rather than the socio-cultural background knowledge that differs significantly with each participant. This strong reliance on the linguistic code results in the priority of literal meaning over non-literal, figurative language and formulaic language. This is why ELF language use generally lacks idiomaticity, which is so important in native–native communication. (Kecskes 2007: 204)

In intercultural communication, the mutual knowledge non-native English speakers share with native English speakers is largely confined to the linguistic

code (cf. Kecskes 2014: 116). This is also true of the news reading situations where the newspaper readership comprises primarily EFL readers, whose use of English is more semantically transparent and contains less formulaic intertexts, the meanings of which go beyond what is encoded in the text and co-text. The rarity of formulaic intertexts in *GDN* and *CP* stories reflects the mainstream pragmatic choice of the copy editors in preparing their news stories for non-native readers.

Second, formulaic intertexts tend to be avoided in non-native news reading contexts because non-native speakers may not process formulaic sequences the same way as native speakers do. Formulaicity is an integral feature of native speaker language use (Boers and Lindstromberg 2012). Many researchers have noted that formulaic sequences are prevalent in language use (e. g. Erman and Warren 2000; Martinez and Schmitt 2012; Siyanova-Chanturia et al. 2011). However, studies have also shown that non-native language speakers find formulaicity particularly challenging (for a review of relevant studies, see Meunier 2012). Since non-native speakers do not have the innate native intuition about formulaic language, they frequently fail to notice or process formulaic sequences in the foreign language. In particular, formulaic sequences that are opaque or culture-specific pose a peculiar difficulty to foreign language users (Shie 2010: 91). Their failure to grasp the actual situational meanings of formulaic sequences may also be ascribed to their unfamiliarity with the shared knowledge or cultural heritage with which the source text of an adapted formulaic sequence is involved. In addition, part of the attraction of a formulaic intertext is derived from the sociocultural significance of the intertextual source text, whose salience is conducive to the attention-catching quality that helps realize the pragmeme of invitation. Idioms used nonliterally, catchphrases, proverbs, and slogans (whose adaptations were all found in the database) are culturally shaped and deeply embedded in the sociocultural norms of a particular speech community (cf. Prodromou 2008: 28). They are closely associated with sociocultural contexts (Kecskes 2000; Van Lancker Sidtis 2004). Solidarity or identification with a sociocultural group is signaled by a range of formulaic expressions, especially idioms. Without being immersed permanently or regularly in a native English-speaking society or culture, a non-native English speaker would find it difficult to activate and process a formulaic intertext. Therefore, in the database far more formulaic intertexts were found in the ENL or EOL contexts. For example, the *NYT* lead “Denis Spitzer wants to beat dogs at their own game”¹⁹ contains a formulaic intertext, which, however, was edited

¹⁹ *NYT* lead, 15 October 2012, under the headline “Devices Go Nose to Nose with Bomb-Sniffer Dogs.”

out of the corresponding *IW* news story.²⁰ Furthermore, formulaic expressions frequently entail an evaluative stance non-native speakers may not recognize. As Van Lancker Sittis and Rallon (2004: 208) put it, “formulaic expressions are generally laced with attitudinal or emotional innuendoes.” They often carry emotional or attitudinal content as part of the wordplay and humor that facilitate the pragmeme of invitation. A case in point in the database is “beauty is only skin deep,” adapted into “the beauty of the home is skin deep.”²¹ It is the proverb’s affective nuance (namely feeling or attitude of contempt) that attracts the reader and helps realize the intertextual pragmatic act.

Finally, comprehension or appreciation of a formulaic intertext requires the assumed shared knowledge of the intertextual source text, which non-native readers often lack or have to a lesser extent than native speakers do. This is inferable from the fact that non-native speakers use formulaic language to a much lesser extent than native speakers (Kecskes 2014). For that reason, press stories chiefly for EFL readers tend to avoid formulaic intertexts, which require activation of the knowledge about their source texts. As Kecskes (2014) points out, formulaic sequences have a framing power. Formulaic intertexts create a particular frame via the invocation of the source text. The intertextual source text serves as a cognitive structure that guides the representation or perception of the alluding text. Activating the source text is thus a necessary precondition of realizing the intertextual pragmatic act. The source text constitutes the “core common ground” (or assumed shared knowledge)²² in the realization of the intertextual pragmatic act. When the alluding text is recognized as a formal or semantic variant of the source text, the intertextual association can be perceived, which constitutes the “emergent common ground” (emergent participant resource, a post facto emergence through use).²³ The problem is that non-native readers of formulaic intertexts share very limited core common ground, let alone emergent common ground, for constructing the intertextual meaning or appreciating the intertextual significance.

Press stories have their own generic discourse organization, comprising salient discourse units, such as the headline, lead, and coda (the final paragraph).²⁴

20 *IW* news story, 30 October 2012, under the headline “New Bomb Detection Technology Tries to Rival Dog’s Noses.” As noted earlier, each *IW* news story corresponds to a *NYT* news story in the sense that the former is always edited from the latter, and hence covers the same story content as the latter.

21 *NYT* body copy, 18 July 2012, under the headline “Wood, Mortar, Magic.”

22 Cf. Kecskes and Zhang (2009).

23 Cf. Kecskes and Zhang (2009).

24 Cf. Shie (2012).

It is notable that formulaic intertexts tend to occur in these salient discourse units rather than in the other parts of the press story (henceforth referred to as the “body” of the story for convenience of discussion), as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of formulaic intertexts across different discourse units of the news stories.

	<i>GDN</i>	<i>CP</i>	<i>MEN</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>NYT</i>	Total	Percent
Headline	2	2	15	16	2	18	55	46.6
Lead	0	0	3	9	2	4	18	15.3
Body	2	2	0	7	7	13	31	26.3
Coda	0	0	3	2	4	5	14	11.9
Total	4	4	21	34	15	40	118	100
<i>n</i>	296	264	280	269	286	286	1,681	

Note: *n* = total number of sampled news articles.

The headline, lead, and coda are a very small span of text in a press story, while the body is usually a much larger one. But in the database only 26.3% of the formulaic intertexts were found in the body of the stories. The headline offers the greatest affordance for a formulaic intertext, containing 46.6% of the intertexts. Given their small sizes of text, the lead (15.3%) and coda (11.9%) can be regarded as the second and third most optimal context for the intertexts, respectively. The affordances between formulaic intertexts and the three discourse units may be taken as an index of their saliency to the reader. In other words, the headline is the part of a news story most salient to the reader, followed by the lead and the coda. These salient units enjoy prominence due to their unmistakable discourse functions in the situation. The headline not only presents or relates the main points of the news story, but also grabs and holds the reader’s attention. As the most salient unit of a press story, the headline is normally processed by the reader first. The lead expresses the major semantic categories of a news event, such as main actors, main event, and main location (Van Dijk 1986: 161). The coda completes the story and usually circles back to the beginning by recalling main-theme ideas or commenting on the current or future development of the news event (Shie 2012). The formulaic intertexts in these salient parts or units make the pragmatic act of inviting in situational use, namely to attract the reader’s attention and draw the reader into the body copy, more possible. The sociocultural/textual saliency of intertexts and contextual saliency of these discourse units go hand in hand and contribute to the execution of the perlocutionary force in the situation.

5 Concluding remarks

Formulaic expressions are prefabricated chunks of language ubiquitous in everyday discourse and hence constitute an important aspect of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia 2008). They are frequently adopted or adapted to evoke intertextual associations that disrupt or defamiliarize the automatized formulaic frame. This study has been an attempt to contribute to our knowledge of formulaic intertexts across English newspapers in different pragmatic contexts. The paradoxical pragmatic phenomenon of formulaic creativity has been explored in terms of the notion of formulaic intertexts. In the sampled English press news, conventionalized prefabricated constructions are found to underline many ingenious and innovative expressions, especially those in some particular textual and situational contexts, including those in salient parts of a news story and those for a target audience with general pattern of exposure and acquisition of English (i. e. ENL and EOL). Specifically, the findings of the study are: (i) formulaic intertexts tend to be situated in the context of a large newspaper targeted at ENL or EOL speakers rather than a small newspaper targeted at EFL speakers; (ii) idioms and proverbs are the most adaptable formulaic sequences in press stories; and (iii) formulaic intertexts tend to occur in salient discourse units (i. e. the headline, lead, and coda) of a news story. The survey and analysis have shed some light on the affordance between formulaic intertexts and the pragmatic contexts of the news stories.

This research is exploratory in nature in the sense that there is a lack of previous studies about formulaic intertexts across different pragmatic contexts. As with many other exploratory studies, this research has its limitations. Due to limited resources, this study has examined one type of allusive intertexts in only six English newspapers in different pragmatic situations. It remains to be seen to what extent the findings can be extended to other newspapers in similar pragmatic contexts. Further investigation is also needed to cover more categories of allusive intertexts (or other types of the pragmatic act of inviting, such as punning and metaphorizing) in a broader variety of pragmatic contexts.

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Bionote

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