

Phrase of the Week

Motivation

Proponents of the “[lexical approach](#)” to language teaching have long called for teaching formulaic “chunks” of language in addition to individual words and grammatical structures. There is some evidence that teaching formulaic chunks explicitly can make students more fluent and more confident in their language production (e.g. [Boers 2006](#), [Boers & Lindstromberg 2009](#), [Wood 2009](#), [Orlik 2017](#)), and learning formulaic chunks is assumed to increase students’ motivation by increasing their communicative capabilities even early in the language learning process (e.g. [Hakuta 1976](#): 333).

Many attempts to teach such “chunks” have focused on the most common combinations of words as used by native English speakers ([Omidian et al. 2016](#)). The procedure proposed here is slightly different in that it focuses on phrases that students are likely to use in their day-to-day life, both in and outside school, either in conversation or in their own internal monologue. It is thus part of a strategy to accustom students to “think in English” and to put what they learned in school to use in their everyday life.

Procedure

1. At the beginning of the week, the phrase (in written form) is placed in a spot that should be visible to all incoming students. This can be the blackboard, a notice board beside the door, the learning platform, etc.
2. At some point during that day (not necessarily in the morning), the phrase is introduced to all the students. Its meaning and usage is explained, some examples are given, and students practice its pronunciation. This can be done by a teacher at first, but responsibility for introducing phrases of the week should be increasingly devolved to students. Where class sizes are equal to or lower than the number of school weeks in a year, every student should have the opportunity to introduce at least one phrase over the course of a year.
3. Students are instructed what to do with the phrase:
 - a. Use it as often as possible throughout the week: in conversation with colleagues (also to remind them when they could have used the phrase) and with others; in their own internal monologue; in written conversations (e.g. online); etc. They are also encouraged to see if they spot the phrase in English-language texts or media.
 - b. Remember at least one instance in which they used the phrase (in conversation or internally) during the week, to present at the beginning of the next week.
4. Starting in the second week, 3-5 randomly chosen students and volunteers explain when and how they used the phrase during the previous week.

Teachers are also encouraged to use the phrase in class whenever possible. Ideally, current and past phrases of the week could become “running gags” among students and staff.

Ideas for phrases

To be amended and extended as needed. Students should be encouraged to suggest phrases of their own. If the selection seems to lean passive-aggressive, that is because many of the phrases were taken from conversations among English-speaking teenagers.

1. Are you serious?
2. What's the matter with you?
3. What's the point of all this?
4. Been there, done that.
5. Wait, what?
6. I don't think so.
7. I can't imagine how that must feel.
8. I call bullshit.
9. I wouldn't do that if I were you.
10. This is shaping up to be one hell of a day. (= good OR bad!)
11. I'm wrecked. I'm done. I'm so fried.
12. Does it get any more annoying?
13. This could be really nice if it wasn't so (hot/cold/boring/...)
14. Who are you trying to impress?
15. That's not a nice thing to say.
16. Way ahead of you!
17. Wait, is this for real?
18. I disagree.
19. That's neither here nor there.
20. I want him/her/you/it to stop.
21. He's/She's/You've got a point there.
22. That makes no sense at all.
23. That's one of the nicest things I've heard in a while!
24. Can't you just leave him/her/me/it alone?
25. Don't you dare!
26. I see what you did there.
27. This, too, shall pass.
28. Calm down. Breathe deeply. Count to ten.
29. That's better.
30. Please don't make a fuss. Please don't make a fuss. Please...
31. Every failure is a chance to learn.
32. If at first you don't succeed...
33. That is literally the most stupid thing I've ever heard.
34. Can you not.
35. That sounds familiar.
36. Well that was unexpected.
37. Haven't I done/heard/seen this before?
38. No big deal.
39. That's a major improvement.
40. What the hell is wrong with you?
41. Something's not quite right.
42. If you don't hurry up, I'll kick your ass.
43. Let's leave it at that.
44. What is it with that guy/girl/man/cat/...?
45. I keep running into weird people.