LING 490: Introduction to formulaic language

**What is formulaic language?** Formulaic language covers a range of prefabricated linguistic units from idioms and proverbs to speech act routines, turns of phrase and collocations. All of these are considered not to be creatively strung together each time anew following the rules of the language, but to be holistically retrieved (by the speaker) and processed (by the hearer), which allows them to depart to various degrees from their predictable, compositional semantic meanings. One important feature of formulaic language is arbitrariness: there is often no particular (linguistic) reason why a particular expression should be preferred among semantically equivalent expressions to fulfill a particular communicative function, thereby becoming a formulaic means of expressing a particular meaning. Explanations for the emergence of formulaic expressions have consequently been sought in the direction of socio-historical (macro-) and psychological (micro-) explanations. Speakers’ displays of identity and of alignment with particular groups provide one especially promising direction for hypothesis formation in this respect.

**Content and Goals:** This seminar provides an introduction to the study of formulaic language, and the related fields of phraseology and usage-based grammars. It brings together state of the art research in cross-cultural pragmatics, corpus and applied linguistics, and historical and evolutionary linguistics, in an attempt to pin down the phenomenon of formulaicity and its importance for linguistic theory from a number of perspectives. Topics include definitions and levels of formulaicity, orality and memory, formulaic language and protolanguage, and formulaic language and first and second language acquisition. The goal is to prompt a reassessment of the traditional competence : performance dichotomy, by exploring potential interactions between use and knowledge of language.

**Organization:** Lecture presentations and guided discussions of set texts. Students will also have the opportunity to suggest particular texts they would like to discuss.

**Evaluation:** Evaluation for this course will be in three parts:
- class participation: 40%
- final research paper: 40%
- presentation of an article in class: 20%

**Prerequisites:** Any general introduction to linguistics (e.g., Linguistics 100: Introduction to Language Science). More advanced courses such as LING 400 (Introduction to Linguistic Structure), or LING 470 (Mind, Culture and Society) desirable but not required.