

# Speech formulae in English: problems of analysis and dictionary treatment

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## 1. Introduction

Speech formulae are the poor relations of lexicography – and for that matter of phraseology. As someone with an interest in both fields, I propose to revisit some relatively undeveloped areas of both, suggesting an approach to the analysis of speech formulae which takes account of formal and pragmatic features, and offering a critical account of how they are treated in some of the most recent specialized English dictionaries.

I use the term “speech formulae” to refer to a sub-class of pragmatic word-combinations. They are expressions, typically of sentence length, used in organizing discourse, conveying a speaker’s attitude to other participants and their messages and generally easing the flow of interaction. Examples include *you know what I mean*, *I beg your pardon?* and *you don’t say!* Rosemarie Gläser and Igor Mel’čuk, both of whom recognize pragmatic combinations in their analytical schemes (the former using the term “proposition,” the latter “pragmatic phraseme,” or “pragmateme”), have included very few examples of speech formulae in recent work, though Gläser does recognize, as *routine* formulae, such expressions as *mind the step* and *hold your horses* (see Gläser 1998:127), while Mel’čuk cites as a sub-type of pragmateme *no talking please* (see Mel’čuk 1995:177). My contention is that Gläser’s routine formulae (and Mel’čuk’s unnamed sub-type) are quite different from what I have called speech formulae. I shall begin by clarifying that difference, afterwards moving on to a more elusive category closely allied to the class of speech formulae.

Since at least the 1960s in the East European tradition, it has been customary – though under a variety of labels – to recognize a distinction between “semantic combinations,” which function syntactically at or below the level of the simple sentence – as predicates, noun phrases, prepositional phrases and the like – and contribute to their referential meaning, and “pragmatic combinations,” which operate sententially as proverbs, catchphrases and slogans (see Cowie 1988, 1998a). This distinction is shown in Figure 1 at the second level of categorization.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent attempt at setting out a general categorization that many phraseologists use, though with wide terminological differences, see Cowie (1998b).

<b>Word-combinations</b> Phrasemes (Mel'čuk 1995, 1998), Phrasal lexemes (Moon 1998a)			
<b>Semantic combinations</b> Semantic phrasemes (Mel'čuk 1995, 1998) Nominations (Gläser 1986, 1998)		<b>Pragmatic combinations</b> Pragmatic phrasemes (Mel'čuk 1995, 1998) Propositions (Gläser 1986, 1998)	
<b>Collocations</b>	<b>Idioms</b>	<b>Proverbs (etc)</b>	<b>Routine Formulae</b>

**Figure 1** Categorization of word-combinations

Examples of the semantic type are *break one's fall* and *curry favour* (collocation and idiom, respectively), and of the pragmatic type *many hands make light work* (proverb), *if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen* (catchphrase), and *Heineken refreshes the parts that other beers cannot reach* (slogan) (Gläser 1986, Cowie 1994, Howarth 1996). In addition to those traditional categories, pragmatic combinations, in Gläser's treatment, include the class referred to earlier as "routine formulae," as can be seen from the figure.

Three of the routine formulae cited by Gläser are: *mind the step*, *many happy returns* and *hold your horses* (Gläser 1998:127). Such expressions belong to a single category. They commonly occur independently of verbal extension or verbal response – though note *please mind the step*, *many happy returns of the day* and *hold your horses a minute* – and they function as warnings, greetings, enquiries after health, prohibitions, and so on – that is, as various kinds of socially recurrent speech act (see Moon 1998b).<sup>2</sup>

It is tempting to regard *I beg your pardon* and *you know what I mean*, which are speech formulae, as belonging to the same category as *good morning* or *mind the step*. After all, the first pair, like the second, can occur as independent sentences, and all four have a speech-act function. The two speech formulae are used, respectively, as an apology or request for clarification and as a check on understanding, as can be seen from the following examples:

- (1) a. "We're in trouble if it won't fit in." "*I beg your pardon*, if it won't fit in what?"  
 b. "Well, my parents ... were all right, *you know what I mean* – they weren't wealthy but they'd always got enough to live on.'

But those examples point to crucial differences. The two speech formulae, as here, occur almost as often as not in a wider sentential context (as borne out by the British National Corpus). Moreover, *I beg your pardon* functions chiefly as a response to

<sup>2</sup> Some routine formulae have several variant forms. For an account of variant expressions of thanks in the London-Lund Corpus (e.g. *thank you very much*, *thanks very much indeed*) see Altenberg (1998).

something another speaker has said, while *you know what I mean*, though not a reaction to an interlocutor, serves to check that he or she has grasped the meaning of *all right* (which is later made explicit). The second formula thus has reference both to the listener and to the language of the speaker's own utterance.

Although *many happy returns* and *mind the step* are of course addressed to a listener or reader, they are not essentially interactive: they do not require a verbal response, nor do they serve as one. Speech formulae are, by contrast, typically interactive, a distinction that calls for the setting up of a category parallel to but separate from routine formulae. For the remainder of this discussion, I shall regard routine and speech formulae as sub-types within a category designated simply as "formulae" (renaming and subdividing "routine formulae" for this purpose in Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Data

For the present study I drew chiefly on corpus material from the British National Corpus (BNC). Before detailed analysis began, I had become aware of two possible sub-types of speech formulae, without as yet being certain of their distinctive constituent structures, syntactic functions, or communicative functions. I drew up a list of forty expressions which seemed potentially assignable to one or the other sub-type (though noting also a number which appeared, and remain, problematic), and proceeded to gather examples from the BNC.

I was not deterred from analysing *not to put too fine a point on it*, say, by the discovery that there were only 13 instances of the expression in the BNC (as compared, say, with 264 occurrences of *on the face of it*). Indeed, as recent research at Leeds has shown, idioms, proverbs and formulae which native speakers have no difficulty in recognizing despite quite severe distortions of their forms – and which they can thus, in a sense, be said to know – may have very low or zero frequencies of occurrence in even quite large text corpora (see Cowie 2000). It is worth noting, for instance, that the formulae *don't hold your breath*, *if you don't mind*, *don't get me wrong* and *if you don't mind my saying so* – all of which were on my original list of forty items, and were familiar at least to me – are not represented in the British National Corpus at all. In the absence of any corpus evidence in those cases, I in fact excluded such items from further analysis, while recognizing that my grounds for doing so were at least questionable. Thirty-three items were, in the end, fully analysed.

## 3. Two types of speech formulae?

Before going any further, we need to return briefly to the possible sub-division of speech formulae mentioned earlier. The item *you know what I mean*, as used in (1b), resembles in some respects *if anything*, appearing later in this paper as (16):

- (16) The painting ... was a good, vigorous action picture; *if anything*, I think she was a better draughtsman than a painter.

Both reflect on something the speaker has already said, the first by focusing on a fine difference of meaning in the phrase *all right* (i.e. 'comfortably off'), the second by introducing a qualification after a positive comment in the first clause ("The painting

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Pawley applies the term "speech formulas" to such examples as *I am pleased/delighted/very happy to meet you* and *I declare the/this X open*, i.e. to routine formulae according to my definition of the term (Pawley 1996: 200-201).

was a good, vigorous action picture.”). Both, as it were, have a superior role as compared with sentence elements such as objects and adjuncts: they have a scope that extends over some (in the latter case, all) of the earlier part of the utterance.

Yet there are important differences. *You know what I mean* is a finite independent clause (significantly introduced by *you*); *if anything* is a verbless clause, apparently functioning as an element in clause structure (cf. *indeed, in fact*) – though with the qualification already made. Most importantly, *you know what I mean* draws the interlocutor in: the speaker is checking on his or her understanding of the fine difference of sense. I shall now attempt to deal in rather more detail with these differences, beginning with the first type, which I shall refer to without qualification as “speech formulae”.

#### 4. Speech formulae

As we have already seen, a striking indicator of the category is the presence of the pronoun *you* (denoting the person or persons addressed), or occasionally of the determiner *your* (as in *I beg your pardon*). No less than sixteen of the twenty-one items classified in Table 1 as interactive are so marked (and this is to ignore the polysemy of three of the relevant items). Here it is interesting to contrast *as you might say*, which does not denote interaction (*you* in this case being equivalent to *one*) and is not classified as a speech formula in the strict sense:

- (1) ‘We are casting about, *as you might say*, hoping to pick up a whiff of a scent.’

Speech formulae of this type are usually not idiomatic – if by idiomatic is meant semantically opaque. (In this body of data, *you have to hand it to him* and *if you catch my drift* are obvious exceptions.) In fact, I have been struck by the fact that in several cases the formula has a non-phraseological, literal homonym whose meaning throws some light on the function of the formula. Consider again example (1b), *you know what I mean*:

- (1) b. “Well, my parents were all right, *you know what I mean* – they weren’t wealthy but they’d always got enough to live on.”

Here, the formula can be glossed “I assume you understand the fine difference of meaning involved here (but I’m checking)” and that can be compared with the sense of the literal homonym, as in this example:

- (3) “You know what I mean by cardiac arrest.”

(Compare, by the way, the passive transformation *not* available to the speech formula: “You know what is meant by cardiac arrest.”)

If we now return to the formal properties of the twenty formulae in the sample, it quickly becomes clear that, if they are removed from their immediate syntactic contexts – in the following examples, complex or compound-complex sentences – they are for the most part simple sentences themselves (that is, syntactic units each consisting of a single independent clause). Of the twenty examples, thirteen are independent finite clauses – eight declarative, three interrogative and two imperative. The following examples illustrate the possible range:

- (4) a. "You'll be doing all the washing-up on your own, Keith, *I can tell you.*"  
 b. "He'd have that salad, and *do you know*, ten minutes, fifteen minutes after, he'd say he was hungry?"  
 c. "It's fun, *don't get me wrong*, but I don't want to be built up just to be knocked down again."

Of the remaining seven items in the sample, five are formally conditional (*if* clauses), one possibly a verbless clause (*more fool you*) and one a noun phrase (*no problem*). In the case of *if you know what I mean* and *if you see what I mean* there is some merging of the independent and dependent categories. A common variant of *if you know what I mean*, as we have just seen, is *you know what I mean?* (a declarative question). *If you see what I mean* has parallel variation. Three of the *if*-clauses function as checks on understanding, by the way, and one as a check on the acceptance of a claim.

The main-clause status of so many items – as illustrated by the three examples at (4) – is clearly crucial. First, they actually occur in the corpus data as one-clause sentences in several cases, often with a high frequency of occurrence as compared with uses in which the formula forms part of a complex sentence. Of the 28 occurrences of *are you with me?* found in the BNC, for example, 20 represent one-clause sentences referring to an earlier utterance by the same speaker. In the case of *you can say that again*, there are 29 occurrences in all, of which 15 represent one-clause sentences, while 14 are simple sentences supported by a final reporting clause. All of those, of course, are responses to remarks by another speaker. Consider these examples:

- (5) a. "It's been a very unfortunate episode for all concerned." "*You can say that again!*"  
 b. "The place is full of memories for you," she said in a voice that betrayed a depth of sympathy. "*You can say that again,*" he admitted gruffly.

**Table 1**

Speech formulae: independent and dependent clause types and their communicative functions

Example	Clause type	Functional type
<i>I ask you</i>	Finite Indep. Declar.	Invitation to react
<i>I beg to differ</i>		Disagreement
<i>I beg your pardon 1,2</i>		Apology; Request for clarification.
<i>You have to hand it to him</i>		Positive response to sb.
<i>You can say that again</i>		Positive response to statement
<i>I can tell you</i>		Reinforcement of statement
<i>I told you so</i>		Expression of satisfaction
<i>You must be joking</i>		Mocking dismissal
<i>Are you with me?</i>	Interrog.	Check on understanding
<i>Do you know?</i>		Signals info. is surprising
<i>Would you believe (it)?</i>		Signals info. is surprising

<i>Don't get me wrong</i>	Imper.	Appeal to sb. not to misunderstand
<i>Call it what you like</i>		Challenge to recognize
<i>(If) you know what I mean</i> 1,2Dep.	If-clause	Check on understanding
<i>(If) you see what I mean</i> 1,2,3		Check on understanding
<i>If you catch my drift</i>		Check on understanding
<i>If you like</i>		Check on acceptance of claim
<i>If ... so be it</i>		Call for acceptance
Phrase type		
<i>No problem</i> 1,2,3	NP	Signals agreement, etc.
<i>(The) more fool you</i>	Unclassified	Contemptuous dismissal

The key related point is that the use of the formula in isolation, as it were, underlines and makes salient the speech act it is used to perform. Here at (6) is *I ask you*, as an invitation to the listener to consider how surprising or ridiculous an event is that has just been described:

- (6) The most ridiculous-looking women go up to her [a TV star] and tell her their old men think they look just like her. They're covered with paint, they have navy blue hair roots. *I ask you*.

Occurrence as a separate unit combined with speech-act function may indeed count as evidence that a verbless unit (for instance, *more fool you* or *no problem*) ranks as a speech formula. Example (7) shows *no problem* used as an acknowledgment of thanks:

- (7) "Oh, and thanks for fixing the lights." "*No problem.*"

Of course, we shall also find many instances in which the formula functions within a more or less complex "response" *sentence*. Here, we need to examine the correspondence between the distribution of a given formula and its communicative function. There is one straightforward case and a number of more complex, less easily analysable, ones. When the role of the formula is to express the speaker's response to an earlier utterance by another person – as in the *you can say that again* example, at (5) – we will expect to find the formula occurring initially in the adjacent response sentence, or also adjacent, but functioning as a more or less independent unit. This is broadly speaking what happens, as these two examples demonstrate:

- (8) a. "We're in trouble if it won't fit in." "*I beg your pardon*, if it won't fit in what?"  
 b. "Do you mind if I pay for this by credit card?" "*No problem.*"

Yet it is by no means always the case that a formula is part of the response to a statement or question uttered by someone else. In the data we find both monosemous and polysemous speech formulae. If we lump together the meanings of both types, we have 26 formula senses in all. But of these, only 5 have to do with a response to

another speaker. The great majority are interactive in some other sense. Look at the following example:

- (9) a. "Now, the Yale and the Union, they'd got a certain type of lock that they produced, and it was all done with a system, *you know what I mean?*"

Here the formula, which is in final position, is addressed to the listener – incidentally turning a statement into a question – but it serves to check that he or she has understood the meanings of *a certain type of lock* and *a system*, which are not made explicit. The formula thus has reference both to the interlocutor and to the language of the speaker's utterance.

Notice too, in that example, that the language items to which the listener's attention is especially drawn are spread over the two clauses. This helps to explain why the formula is in end position. If the speaker wished to check understanding of *a certain type of lock* only, the formula would appear at the end of the *first* coordinate clause, like this:

- (9) b. 'Now, the Yale and the Union, they'd got a certain type of lock that they produced – *you know what I mean?* – and it was all done with a system.'

Mobility varies considerably from one formula to another, the chief controlling factor being the precise communicative function of the formula. If the purpose of using *are you with me?*, for example, is to check whether, at any moment, the listener is following and understanding what is being said, we would expect the formula to be able to appear at any point, even to the extent of disrupting main clause structure, as in this example:

- (10) . "It could be a car, like we've just said, but then again, I've never had a new car. It could be – *are you with me?*"

If, on the other hand, the function of the formula is to challenge someone to recognize that the name you give to something is less important than the thing itself, then, not surprisingly, the formula comes after the name of the thing, as here:

- (11) The Ercoupe/Aircoupe, *call it what you like*, is a simple, safe, sturdy and economical little plane that flies nicely.

Finally, we can expect the possible syntactic mobility of a formula to be affected by institutionalized shifts in its meaning. When *I beg your pardon* is used to ask someone politely to explain or clarify something, it appears, as we have seen, initially in a response sentence. When, on the other hand, it is used to apologize for and correct an error of language that the speaker has made, it appears immediately after the error and before the corrected form:

- (12) "I well appreciate we are not going to stop Mr Laycock driving or commute *I beg your pardon*, commuting – each day from Harrogate."

## 5. Adverbials

Let us now turn to reconsider the category I referred to earlier as a clause constituent, though with a "superior" role when compared with other elements. I suggested that,

alongside some similarities, one could observe differences of constituent class, syntactic distribution and functional type between this category and speech formulae proper. We have seen that the constituent classes chiefly associated with speech formulae in the strict sense are finite independent and dependent clauses. By contrast, we find a number of clause and phrase classes that fall within the range of linguistic structures that typically realize the adverbial element (see Quirk et al. 1985:489). Specifically, seven of my admittedly small sample of thirteen are non-finite and finite subordinate clauses (e.g. *to coin a phrase, as you might say*), while six are prepositional and noun phrases (e.g. *on the face of it, no mean feat*). (See Table 2.)

**Table 2**

*Adverbials: clause and phrase types*

Examples	Clause type		Word/phrase equivalents
<i>As you might say</i>	Finite	Dependent	
<i>As the saying goes</i>			
<i>To coin a phrase</i>	Non-finite		
<i>To cut a long story short</i>			briefly, to be brief
<i>To put it another way</i>			
<i>To put it mildly/putting it mildly</i>			
<i>Not to put too fine a point on it</i>			bluntly, to be blunt
Phrase type			
<i>On the face of it</i>	Prepositional phrase		superficially
<i>In a nutshell</i>			in essence, in a few words
<i>If anything 1,2</i>			nonetheless; on the contrary
<i>For goodness sake! 1,2</i>	Noun phrase		
<i>Good grief!</i>			
<i>No mean feat</i>			

We can go further, noting that a number of the items are *disjuncts* (and specifically “style” or “content” disjuncts) according to the characterizations by Quirk et al. (1985). According to this account (1985:615), “Style disjuncts convey the speaker’s comment on the style and form of what he is saying.” Clearly of this sub-type are *to cut a long story short* (cf. *briefly*), *not to put too fine a point on it* (cf. *bluntly*) and *in a nutshell* (cf. *succinctly, in essence*) (see Table 2). By contrast, *on the face of it* (cf. *superficially*) is a “content” disjunct, and in particular one which refers “to the ‘reality’ or lack of ‘reality’ in what is said” (1985:621) and indeed expresses a contrast with reality.<sup>4</sup>

Since these expressions are not finite independent clauses, it is hardly surprising that they seldom function as one-constituent sentences. The formula *to coin a phrase* occurs independently in the BNC data only once in eleven instances; *no mean feat* twice in twenty-nine instances. Nothing of the kind is recorded for *to put it mildly* or

<sup>4</sup> The great bulk of the style and content disjuncts treated by Quirk et al. (1985) are simple words and transparent phrases. None of the *phraseological* disjuncts featured in the present analysis appear in the *Comprehensive Grammar*.

*as you might say*. As for the syntactic distribution of these classes, and taking account of the polysemy of *if anything* and *for goodness sake*, we have fifteen meanings. Of these, twelve – the great majority – function as adverbials typically do – in initial, medial and final positions, as in these examples:

- (13) a. *To put it mildly*, this is misguided and misleading nonsense.  
b. The highest leadership of State and military was – *to put it mildly* – no longer in control of the situation.  
c. All previous attempts to tie the pound to European currencies have been less successful than Denmark's, *to put it mildly*.

Finally, let us consider in rather more detail relationships that exist between expressions of this type and the sentences in which they occur. There are two related points of interest. First, there is the *linguistic level* at which the adverbial operates. Its focus may be the form or meaning of all or part of the sentence, or the relationship between form and meaning, or indeed the discourse of which the sentence forms part. The second point of interest is the *nature of the unit* to which the adverbial relates, and its *syntactic relationship* to the adverbial.

Let me give an example that captures these two points of interest. The adverbial *as you might say* (in which *you*, it will be recalled, does not denote the addressee) focuses on form. It is used to draw attention to the fact that the form of a phrase used by the speaker is striking in some way. Appropriately, the memorable item – often a noun phrase – immediately precedes the adverbial. In the following example it involves a play on words:

- (14) The response to his trolleybus venture is so great that he now plans to do something along similar lines, *as you might say*, with the railways.

When the focus of the adverbial is on meaning, the identity of the sentence component to which it relates, and its position, may be as easily identified as in the above case. Consider *not to put too fine point on it*. This is used to emphasize that an entire proposition, usually realized as a clause, is the plain truth. The clause usually follows the formula:

- (15) “*Not to put too fine a point on it*, this was the love-nest where he used to bring Lucia.”

The formula *if anything* (referred to earlier) is a more complex and more interesting case. It faces in two directions, as this example shows:

- (16) The painting ... was a good, vigorous action picture; *if anything*, I think she was a better draughtsman than a painter.

On the one hand, as we can see, a connection is implied to a preceding claim or suggestion (“The painting was a good, vigorous action painting”). On the other, *if anything* refers forward to a correction or qualification of that assertion: “*if anything (yet, nonetheless)* I think she was a better draughtsman than a painter.”

We have seen that an adverbial can introduce, correct, signal and evaluate, whether the focus is on form or content. It can, in addition, focus on both together, as in the case of *to put it another way*. It is easy to be deceived by this expression: it is

not concerned, typically, with conveying a given meaning in a different form. Consider this example:

- (17) “When I left her – no, *to put it another way* ... – when she left me, when she quit, she left in perfect repair.”

Here the structure of the opening clause, *A left B*, becomes – after the adverbial – *B left A*. There is a transposition of subject and object, with a corresponding change of meaning.

Clearly, an adverbial can make reference to a wider discourse than the sentence in which it appears. *To cut a long story short* is such an expression. It appears, often introduced by *anyway*, *so* or *well*, after an account which may have extended over several sentences, as a signal that the remainder will be briefly stated, as it is in these two examples:

- (18) a. *Anyway, to cut a long story short*, she flattered my masculine vanity.  
b. *To cut a long story short*, he threw them out of the house.

## 6. Speech formulae in dictionaries

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1995), with an inconsistency to which the best lexicographers are sometimes prone, records *you can say that again* but *not as you might say*, and *you're telling me* but *not I told you so*. As for the treatment of such items in *COD*, they are not, as a rule, given the kind of explanation that their special status calls for. On the other hand, when special glosses do appear they can be very informative. Two definitions are given for the entry **I beg your pardon**. The first provides a clue to the category to which the entry belongs – “a formula of apology or disagreement” – while the second explicitly indicates the speech act that the entry is used to perform: “a request to a speaker to repeat something said.” However, there are no examples.

We expect phraseological dictionaries to do better than this, in breadth of coverage, and in providing suitable definitions. But the recent crop of dictionaries from Cambridge, Collins Cobuild and Longman are – in varying degrees – disappointing on both counts.

Let me deal briefly with coverage. Of the eight declarative finite-clause formulae listed in Table 1 (above), *I can tell you* and *I told you so* are absent from all three dictionaries; only *you have to hand it to him* is present in all three. As for coverage of the adverbial type, I searched in the three works for items that spanned finite and non-finite dependent clauses (so *as you might say*, for example, and *to coin a phrase*). Remarkably, all three dictionaries include – and fail to include – the same entries. *To coin a phrase*, *to cut a long story short*, and *not to put too fine a point on it* are all present; *as you might say*, *as the saying goes*, *to put it another way* are all absent.

Perhaps two influences are at work here. The first is the weight attached to frequency of occurrence in large text corpora. We are only given clear evidence that frequency is a factor in these selections – and rejections – in the Cobuild volume. This is because the editors place a special mark (or marks) alongside entries that are found to occur between one and three times per 10 million words in the Bank of English – or more often still. Now it happens that the various adverbials that we find included in the Cobuild dictionary have the tell-tale marks against them in the margin.

How far the other two dictionaries include items on the grounds of their occurrence in various frequency bands is not made clear. What is certain, though, is that Longman and Cambridge – and to a lesser extent Cobuild – are guided in their choice of entries by traditional and somewhat narrow perceptions of idiomaticity. So Longman lays stress on the view that “idioms add colour to the language” (1998: vii), while Cambridge refers to idioms as “a colourful and fascinating aspect of English” (1998:vi). Both dictionaries emphasize the difficulties of interpretation which idioms often present. Neither refers to formulae by name, or indeed to the role that word-combinations of any kind play in the management of spoken or written discourse.

## 7. Conclusion

I suggested at the outset that a distinction should be drawn between so-called “routine” formulae (*how do you do, see you later*) and “speech” formulae (*are you with me? do you know?*). The former, as their name suggests, are used recurrently in various kinds of social encounter (introductions, greetings and farewells) and may be performed without much, or any, supporting verbal context. Speech formulae, by contrast, typically occur as part of a complex verbal interaction, and often, too, function as a comment on a preceding statement made by the speaker or the listener.

Speech formulae are close in certain functional respects to adverbials, and in particular, perhaps, to disjuncts. This is a consequence of the “superior” role which disjuncts have as compared with other clause elements (such as objects and adjuncts). Disjuncts are “syntactically more detached and in some respects ‘superordinate’, in that they seem to have a scope that extends over the sentence as a whole” (Quirk et al. 1985:613). As we have seen, such “extension” is also a feature of many speech formulae. However, the adverbials we have examined have formal features of their own, including a high degree of association with non-finite independent clauses and with phrases.

All three categories treated here tend to be thinly represented and poorly treated in “idiom” dictionaries, whether for native speakers or foreign learners. As a rule, compilers attach too much weight to the problems of interpretation posed by semantic word-combinations (especially by idioms in the strict sense), and are over-attentive to items that are culturally or stylistically marked. Acute difficulties for the advanced foreign learner – difficulties of appropriate use as well as discourse interpretation – are posed by speech formulae especially, and the proper dictionary treatment of these has yet to begin.

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