

# Formulaic Sequences (FSs) in Early Modern English (EModE) A Corpus-assisted Historical Pragmatic Study

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## WHY IT IS INTERESTING

- **Creativity vs. fixedness:** Even though language is creative, people also use many fixed, clichéd, situation-based multi-word units to say things.
- **A prevalent phenomenon:** FSs in Present-Day English (PDE), being studied exhaustively, are found to make up a large proportion of both spoken (58.6%) and written (52.3%) discourse in PDE<sup>1</sup>.
- **Status of English in Early Modern England (1500-1700):**
  - Introduction of printing press to England (1476) → Standardisation
  - The rise of English → Multi-functional<sup>2</sup>, ranging from private to official.
  - Synthetic to analytic → flexible to fixed word order, e.g. Shakespeare liked to move words around in order to rhyme.
  - Grammaticalization, e.g. "be going to"
    - EModE: literal, moving from place A to B
    - PDE: grammatical, future tense

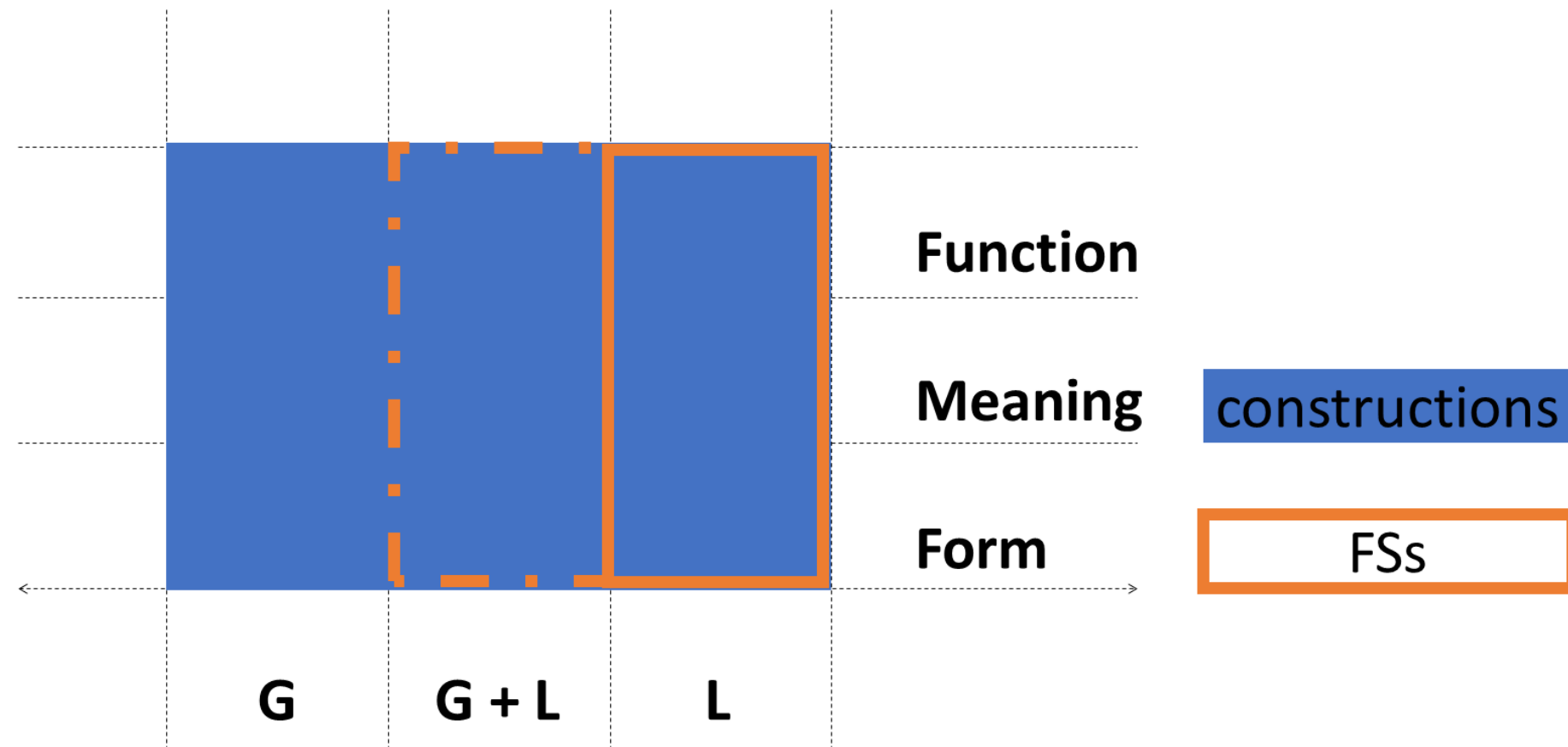
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the form and functions of in EModE communicational texts?
- How do they characterise different types of communications and texts?

## DEFINITION

**Formulaic sequences (FSs):** relatively fixed multi-word units which frequently occur in a certain type of texts and serve as conventional pairing of form, meaning and function.

Figure 1: relationship between FSs and Construction Grammar<sup>3,4</sup>



G: grammatical rules; L: lexical items

**Early Modern English:** 1500 – 1700

**Communicational texts** in this project incl.

Spoken: (authentic & constructed) dialogues | Written: letters

**Function<sup>5</sup>:**

- **Transactional:** the function which language serves in the expression of 'content'.
- **Interactional:** Interactional: the function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitude. (respectively corresponding to "ideational" and "interpersonal" by Halliday<sup>6</sup>.)

**Lexica bundles (LBs):** "the multi-word sequences that recur most frequently and are distributed widely across different texts"<sup>7</sup>.

### NOTE:

L: sequences with/without predictable slots (i.e. semantic elements<sup>2</sup>), e.g. *a cup of X* (X=NP: drinkable liquid).  
G + L: sequences that consist of a lexical part and grammatical slots, e.g. *it is + X* (X=NP/AP).

## METHODOLOGY

### Corpora

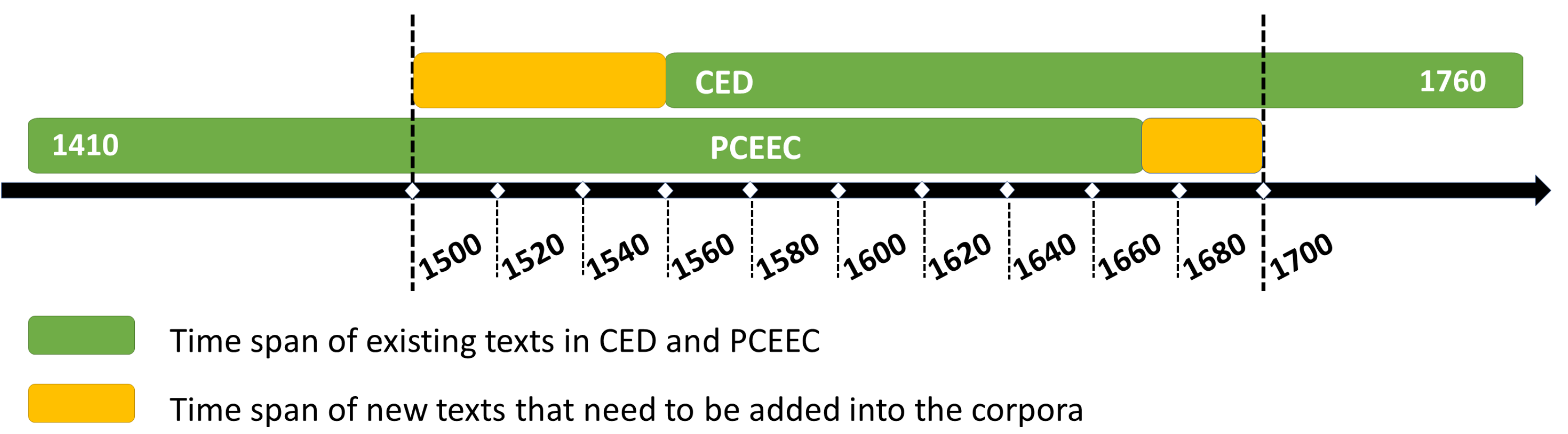
#### Corpus of spoken communication/ speech-related texts:

- A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760 (CED)<sup>8</sup>  
1,2 million words; 177 text files;  
'authentic dialogue' (Trial Proceedings and Witness Depositions), 'constructed dialogue', (Drama Comedy, Didactic Works, and Prose Fiction), Miscellaneous

#### Corpus of written communication/ letters:

- Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence (PCEEC)<sup>9</sup>, c. 1410-1681  
c. 2.2 million words, 84 collections, 666 informants  
E.g. private, official, business letters, etc.

Figure 2: New texts are needed in both spoken and written corpora because CED and PCEEC are not even in size and do not entirely cover the Early Modern period.



### Procedure

#### Step 1: Computer assisted retrieval of LBs → corpus-driven

Frequency; length

#### Step 2: Manually identify FSs from the list of LBs → corpus-based

Completeness in syntax and semantics; fixedness; idiomaticity<sup>7</sup>

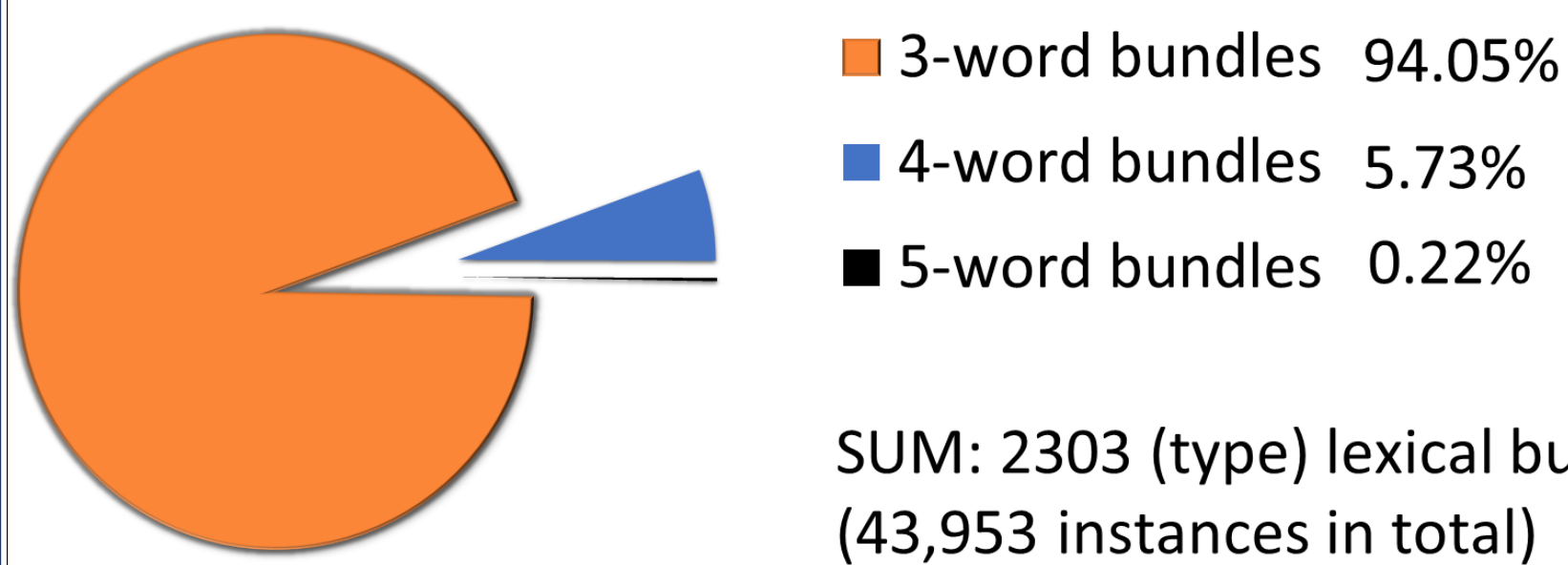
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7. Biber, D. 2015. "Corpus-Based and Corpus-Driven Analyses of Language Variation and Use". In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*, edited by Bernd Heine and Heiko Narrog, 193-224. Oxford: UP.
8. <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/CED/>
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10. Unicode .txt version by Mike Scott (<http://www.lexically.net>)

## PILOT STUDY

**Purpose:** to test the methodology | **Corpus:** 37 plays by Shakespeare<sup>10</sup>; ~0.82 million tokens; modern spelling; not tagged.

**Chart 1:** Length and proportion of the lexical bundles found in the corpus of Shakespeare's plays. No bundles longer than 5 words were found in the corpus and 2-word bundles were not examined.



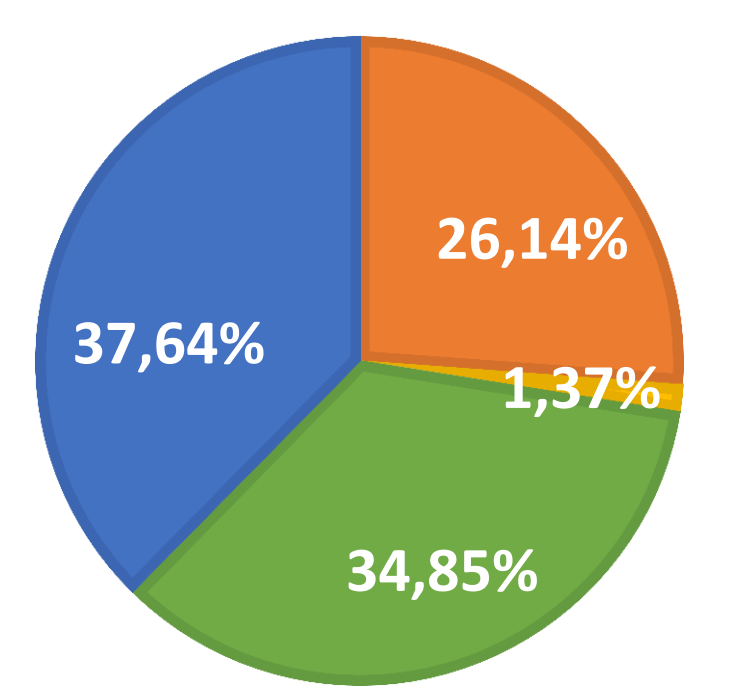
**Table 1:** 500 lexical bundles that have the highest expression rate were analyzed in depth.

	FS	Part of a FS*	Uncertain**	Non-FS
Type/occurrence	128/4,036	9/212	140/5,381	223/5,811
Examples	<i>My good lord</i> (132) <i>I thank you</i> (89) <i>By mine honour</i> (11) <i>How now what news?</i> (11) <i>As fast as</i> (10)	<i>(with) all my heart</i> (49) <i>(give) me thy hand</i> (36) <i>for my own (part)</i> (27)	<i>I will not</i> (214) <i>I am a</i> (141) <i>If I had</i> (32) <i>As we should</i> (10) <i>I will see</i> (10)	<i>My lord I</i> (108) <i>To be a</i> (81) <i>My lord and</i> (73) <i>And in the</i> (70) <i>Will make a</i> (10)

\*They are found as part of longer FSs.

\*\*Empirically, FSs are found as nothing outstanding but certain types of constructions, hence fall in the framework of Construction Grammar<sup>3</sup>. FSs blend in with other constructions at some point where sequences in the "Uncertain" box are likely to be found.

**Chart 2:**



**Table 2:** Categorization on the basis of the degree of schematicity from high to low.\*\*\*

Categories	Grammatical constructions (111)	Semantic constructions (156)	Situational formulae (51)	"Big word" (25)
Type	FS (21) Uncertain (90)****	FS (47) Uncertain (109)	FS (48) Part of a FS (3)	FS (19) Part of a FS (6)
Examples	<i>I have been X</i> <i>I dare not X</i> <i>I will not X</i> <i>I know not X</i>	<i>Must needs be</i> <i>The bottom of X</i> <i>It shall be X</i> <i>There is no X</i>	<i>What's the matter (X)?</i> <i>I (X) beseech [you]</i> <i>Good morrow to X</i> <i>(give) me leave to X</i>	<i>By and by</i> <i>Up and down</i> <i>Had as life</i> <i>For my own</i>

\*\*\*To which extend that sequences require "the addition of a single, semantically or formally restricted semantic elements" (i.e. X) in order to be syntactically and semantically complete, and "if more Xs were allowed in a sequence, the degree of measured schematicity would be higher"<sup>3</sup>. This study restricts the number of compulsory X to one, but there is no limit for the number of optional (X).

\*\*\*\*"Uncertain" bundles are included in this analysis in order to determine if they should be seen as FSs.

**INTERPRETATION:** FSs are found in all 4 categories, but most of them are situational formulae and semantic constructions. Bundles in the "uncertain" box (see Table 1) tend to be syntactic and semantic incomplete, i.e. grammatical constructions ("G+L" in Figure 1) and semantic constructions ("L" in Figure 1).

**Table 3:** First glance at the functions of FSs (only some examples).

Transactional (74)	Interactional (54)	Examples
modifier		<i>A pair of X; A piece of X</i>
to quote		<i>As who should say</i>
opinion		<i>What think you X?</i>
meaning*****		<i>Upon my life; by and by; all the rest; at the least</i>
	to request to speak	<i>Speak with me; a word with you</i>
	to ask for opinion	<i>What say you (X)?</i>
	to ask for permission	<i>Give me leave (X)</i>
	to command	<i>I charge you/thee (X); get you/thee gone</i>
	feeling/thought	<i>In my heart; X of my heart</i>
	to request attention	<i>I tell you/thee</i>
	to show concern	<i>What is the matter (X)?</i>
	to assure	<i>I can tell you/thee</i>
	politeness	<i>I (X) beseech YOU; give me YOUR hand; had as lief</i>

\*\*\*\*\*FSs in this function category seem to be mere form-meaning mapping which does not match the definition of FS. More discussion is needed to decide if they should be considered as FSs.