

The Uses of Formulaic Language in Graham Swift's  
*England and Other Stories*

BOŻENA KUCAŁA

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

**Abstract**

This article argues that in his collection of short stories *England and Other Stories* (2014), as in most of his fiction, Graham Swift is preoccupied with the limits of language, with what remains unsaid or is poorly communicated. In this volume, the writer's focus on private, domestic and ordinary lives corresponds to his representation of the language of everyday interaction as essentially non-creative and formulaic. Swift's deliberately clichéd language reflects what, as contemporary studies of discourse reveal, is a standard mode of social interaction. For example, Roberta Corrigan et al. affirm that linguistic formulae should be considered as yet another manifestation of behavioural routines (xxiii-xxiv), while Alison Wray claims that the reliance on formulaic language "predominates in normal language processing" (*Formulaic Language* 101). A range of uses of formulaic language is analysed in selected stories from the collection. It is demonstrated that, typically, characters choose prefabricated language for the paradoxical purpose of establishing and maintaining a degree of contact with others while avoiding in-depth interaction.

**Keywords:** Graham Swift, *England and Other Stories*, contemporary English fiction, short story, formulaic language, cliché, inarticulacy

After the four decades of Graham Swift's novelistic career, the critical assessment of his oeuvre is now due for a realignment. From the present vantage point it appears that *Waterland* (1983), the book which brought him acclaim and general recognition, and arguably remains his best-known achievement to date, was an exception rather than a representative example of his fiction. After the first two novels,<sup>1</sup> which recounted personal traumas within the narrow confines of a domestic milieu,