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Formulaic Language, Creativity, and Language Play in a Second Language

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Since the late 1990s, the field of applied linguistics has seen a revival of interest in the topic of linguistic creativity and language play, with several theoretical works spawning a variety of empirical studies of (second language) L2 learners. This chapter reviews recent literature in order to examine the reciprocal relationship between formulaic language and L2 language play. Formulaic language provides a point of reference against which other uses can be recognized as creative or playful. At the same time, language play can also create new linguistic conventions. Thus, while the relationship between formulaic language and language play has not been explicitly addressed, as the examples presented here will demonstrate, formulaic language is a necessary part of much language play. This article begins by theorizing the relationship between formulaic and playful language. This relationship is then examined in terms of functions, age differences, and media differences, and the article closes with a number of suggestions for future research.

Applied linguistics in the late 1990s saw a revival of interest in the study of language play and linguistic creativity (Carter, 1999, 2004; Crystal, 1998). The topic had long received attention from researchers in children's first language (L1) development; however, at this time inquiry extended to L2 language play in adolescents and adults (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Cook, 1997, 2000; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Lantolf, 1997; Sullivan, 2000a, 2000b; Tarone, 2000). With Vygotsky (1978) as his theoretical framework, Lantolf (1997) conceptualized language play as private speech that facilitates L2 development by allowing for rehearsal of new language forms. Cook (1997, 2000) took a more expansive view of language play, including not only repetition of forms but their manipulation as well. His definition was also broader, recognizing that language play is not restricted to forms but often involves semantic and pragmatic play, including play with the functions of language. This type of play can involve the creation of joint fictionalizations (e.g., *what if. . .*?) and other types of play often associated with humor, such as banter and joking. In this way, Cook also acknowledged the sense

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of enjoyment that often results from such activity. Thus, while Lantolf focused on play *with* the L2, Cook's wider view included both play *in* and play *with* the L2. Play with the L2 consists essentially of the types of behaviors that are often referred to as *wordplay*, where language itself is manipulated. Although wordplay is generally associated with semantics (e.g., puns) and morphology, any level of language may be manipulated, including phonology, syntax, or pragmatics, for instance, by inventing a new word or subverting a ritual (e.g., "you're not welcome" as a response to "thank you"). Playing in the language involves the use of language to construct and engage in playful activities. This can include actual games, as well as less formalized activities, such as narratives and joking (for further discussion of this distinction, see Bell, 2012; Vandergriff & Fuchs, 2009, in press). The majority of the empirical work that grew from these initial discussions seems to have been taken up largely in Cook's sense of language play.

The interplay between formulaicity and creativity in language use and acquisition is widely recognized (e.g., Myles, Hooper, & Mitchell, 1998; Myles, Mitchell, & Hooper, 1999; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Wray, 2002). Language play, a specific type of creative language use, is often dependent on formulaic language. As Crystal (1998) described it, "To play with language requires that, at some level of consciousness, a person has sensed what is normal and is prepared to deviate from it" (p. 181). We might also add the same for playing in (as opposed to with) a language. Wray's (2008) 11 criteria for determining whether or not a chunk is formulaic include two characteristics that relate to this. First, using irony as an example, Wray noted that in order to judge formulaicity one must be able to judge whether a particular string is associated with a particular situation or register, and that use outside of that context "does not reduce its formulaicity. Rather, its formulaicity is what ensures its ironic interpretation"(p. 117). Second, Wray noted that formulaicity must be recognized in creative expressions that have clearly been derived from prefabricated chunks.

Carter (2004) drew attention to the relationship between language play and formulaicity by referring to creativity that involves pattern re-forming, where speakers manipulate existing strings of prefabricated language to construct new, creative sequences. He contrasted this with pattern-forming creativity, which emerges over time, as speakers echo one another's speech patterns, aligning themselves through recycling and repetition of words and phrases. Cook (2000) also noted the importance of pattern formation in his description of the features of language play, emphasizing the creation of rhythm and grammatical parallels. The resulting discourse patterns that emerge during interaction may remain local patterns of language use, such as the nicknames or in-jokes that develop in intimate relationships. However, in some cases they may spread and become larger patterns that change the way people speak more broadly. For instance, the reality television show *Survivor*, which originated in Sweden in 1997 and has since appeared in numerous other countries, spawned the phrase to "vote someone off the island." Given the popularity of the series, this string has quickly become a formulaic way to describe a situation in which a particular group of individuals is winnowed down, resulting in a winner. At present it seems to

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be used almost exclusively in a joking way.[1] However, it is easy to imagine a future in which this phrase becomes a common, nonplayful way of referring to instances in which a field is narrowed.

The discussion thus far has not focused specifically on L2 users, but on examining the relationship between language play and formulaic language in general. Yet, this relationship clearly has consequences for both L2 teaching and research. The interest in these topics, as well as recent conceptualizations of language itself and of the learning process as nonlinear, potentially signals the type of major shift that occurred when Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence turned our attention from grammatical correctness to appropriateness, from form to function. Historically, applied linguistics has tended to favor linguistic creativity in the sense that Chomsky used it: Competent language users have the ability to construct and understand an infinite variety of new utterances. This conception has had the effect of sidelining the teaching and investigation of playful and creative language, as well as of formulaic language, which was similarly disregarded (cf. Wray, 2002).

In the following sections, I turn to L2 issues, focusing as much as possible on recent work. However, given the fairly recent resurgence in interest in this topic, particularly relevant or illustrative works from earlier will also be included. It is also important to note that while the authors of most of the research and examples presented in this review have not explicitly framed their discussions of language play around the concept of formulaic language, or have done so only tangentially, its presence is evident in many of their examples. Because of that, this review differs somewhat in format from others in this volume. Rather than discussing individual work, I attempt to draw out some initial generalizations regarding formulaic language and language play from parts of many studies, and thus I will largely refer to them in the aggregate. Finally, a major function of this review will also be to identify avenues for future investigations examining the relationship between formulaic language use and language play.

TYPES OF PLAY WITH FORMULAIC LANGUAGE

In this section I draw on two of the ways of organizing types of play already discussed to provide examples of the ways in which L2 users have been observed to play with language. First, the distinction between play with and play in the L2 was noted (Bell, 2012; Vandergriff & Fuchs, 2009, in press), where the former deals with cases in which the language itself is manipulated for play, and the latter with instances in which the language is used to engage in play. Second, Carter's (2004) discussion of some creative language as pattern re-forming helps us focus on play with formulaic sequences, specifically. Pattern re-forming play disrupts familiar conventions, using recognizable sequences in novel ways. (In what follows, for illustration purposes, I take some liberties with the standard conception of formulaic language by including play that involves manipulations of single words).

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Play with the L2 occurs less frequently than play in the L2. Kramsch (2009), however, provided an excellent example of intermediate French students in a U.S. college engaging in play with the L2 in an online chat. One student writes "*vous n'etes pas des* students *mais des stupidents*" (you are not students, but stupidents). This is bilingual play, not only due to the insertion of the English "students," but also in the coinage of the playful term "stupidents." By infixing -pi- the writer manages to jokingly insult his peers by describing them as stupid, while also inventing a word that cleverly echoes both the English word *students* and its French equivalent, *étudiants*. Bilingual play with conventional strings is also illustrated among the 4-year-old English learners in a Mandarin-English bilingual preschool. In this example, the words in italics were spoken in Mandarin:

Jack: [Looks at Willie] *Today is* Friday.
Willie: Friday. *Tomorrow is* SA::TURDAY. [Smiles at Jack]
Ken: *Today is* WILLIEDAY. [Smiles]

(Adapted from Wang & Hyun, 2009, p. 20.)

Here, the learners begin by manipulating the formulaic recitation of the days of the week in a way that seems to be playful for them (they are smiling), even though they are following the rules by inserting the appropriate days in the correct order. Ken then changes the game by adding morphological play, incorporating the previous speaker's name to imagine it as the name of a day of the week. Additional examples of adults playing with the L2 can be found in Bell (2012), Pomerantz and Bell (2007), and many of the studies involving children discussed later. Both of these examples illustrate pattern re-forming language play, although it is possible that they could become pattern-forming play, given repeated use of these new patterns.

More commonly, patterns may be exploited to play in the L2. In the following example, Daoud and Hassan are both intermediate ESL (English as a second language) students in an intensive English program. Daoud has just asked Hassan whether he would be willing to be cloned. The teacher arrives and begins to tease Hassan, joking that she would not want two of him:

6 T: (smiling) two Hassans? no way! [(laughs)
7 Daoud: [(laughs[ )
8 Hassan: [(mock plaintively) why (.) why no way.

(. . .)
18 Hassan: ok. just (.) (mock sadly) I like to be alone right now.

(Adapted from Bell, 2012, p. 251.)

The instructor's teasing affords Hassan the opportunity to take on the persona of a person sorely wronged, and after repeated teasing from the teacher and his classmate (omitted), he uses the formulaic sequence "I['d] like to be alone right now." In this case, the string itself is not manipulated, but the selection of this particular string allows him to express an exaggerated sense of gloom and, in this way, strike back at his attackers. Additional examples of formulaic play in

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the L2 can be found in such works as Bushnell (2009) and Pomerantz and Bell (2007, 2011), as well as many other of the articles cited here.

These two types of play—using formulaic sequences to play with the L2 and using them to play in the L2—are evident across the literature on L2 language play. In the majority of the studies, what is exhibited is pattern re-forming play, whereas evidence of pattern-forming play is much less common (although see Evaldsson & Cekaite, 2010; Lytra, 2007). This may be largely due to the relative lack of longitudinal studies of L2 development. This recent work has enriched our understanding of how L2 users tend to play with language, but clearly further systematic investigation into this matter is called for, with naturalistic studies needed to complement the growing number of classroom studies.

FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE PLAY IN RELATION TO FORMULAIC LANGUAGE

It would seem plausible that formulaic and creative or playful language would perform very different roles in interaction, yet they may in fact be used for similar ends. Formulaic language facilitates efficient communication, from both a psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic standpoint (Schmitt, 2005; Wray, 2000, 2002; Wray & Perkins, 2000). The use of prefabricated chunks of language allows speakers to be more fluent and eases the task of the listener, who is helped by being able to predict what is likely to come next. Formulaic language smooths social interaction, presenting potentially face-threatening acts in socially acceptable ways and constructing individual and group identities. In contrast, language play introduces at least short-term inefficiency. Unusual language, including malformed collocations, takes longer to process (e.g., Millar, 2011). Such language also carries with it some social risk, as playfulness may be seen as disruptive or inappropriate. Language play can, however, also result in long-term rewards.

The ability to play with formulas (use language creatively) and to construct new (playful, creative) formulas has the potential for rich rewards in the social realm, allowing us to perform a range of social actions. These include constructing and reaffirming (group and individual) identities, negotiating shifting alignments, mitigating face-threats, and expressing changes in stance and footing (Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Evaldsson & Cekaite, 2010; Huth, 2010; Lytra, 2007; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007; Talmy, 2010; van Dam, 2002). Evaldsson and Cekaite's (2010) article, for example, presents several extracts demonstrating the sensitivity of a multilingual group of school children to incorrect Swedish formulations and how they reacted swiftly, teasing the offender and thereby upholding monolingual Swedish norms. For these students, formulaic ritual insults (e.g., "eat pooh"), delivered in their home languages, served as a means of getting around classroom regulations regarding so-called good language use. In an example that points to the impact on learning that sanctioned language play activities can have, Pomerantz and Bell (2007) described an event in which one learner, who was deeply invested in his identity as a good-natured class clown and often engaged in off-task behaviors, became highly focused on accurately translating the formulaic language of mathematical story problems into Spanish. His work

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with the L2 was entirely serious, and in doing it, he expanded his vocabulary, while at the same time, as it turned out, creating a trick question to pose to the other team, thus maintaining his salient identity in this class.

Furthermore, students exploit formulaic language for playful purposes in order to cope with classroom tasks and/or to resist or critique the pedagogical approaches used and the classroom norms of interaction (Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Bushnell, 2009; DaSilva Iddings & McCafferty, 2007; Garland, 2010; Lytra, 2007; Pomerantz & Bell, 2011). Blackledge and Creese (2009), for instance, documented strong resistance from a group of heritage language learners of Cantonese, who drew on formulaic sequences from the media (*the one million pound question*) and stylized overuse of conventional ways of providing feedback (*uh-huh uh-huh*) to disrupt a dictation activity. Similarly, Pomerantz and Bell (2011) explored the ways that language play can serve as a kind of pedagogical safe house in language classrooms, allowing learners to express resistance to certain classroom practices. We show how the use of a formulaic sequence, such as *me gusta* in one Spanish class, is playfully exploited to signal adherence to classroom norms of L2 use and engagement with the activity at hand, while simultaneously mocking both of these.

Cognitively, too, language play may occupy a reciprocal role with formulaic language in L2 development and might allow for a resolution of some of the tension between analytic and formulaic learning. Although not explicitly naming formulaic language in a discussion of language play, Tarone (2000) touched upon this relationship, using Bakhtin's (1981) notion of centripetal and centrifugal forces. In this view, language exists with the competing forces of normalization and creativity. The learning of prefabricated chunks contributes to normalization, that is, conventional ways of saying things. Play, on the other hand, as a type of creative language use, can contribute to the forces of change. Because of this, language play may aid in preventing fossilization (Tarone, 2006) and in restructuring and further developing the L2 system (Kim & Kellogg, 2007; Tin, 2011). There is growing evidence that an additional cognitive benefit of play that relates to the learning of formulaic language is that it acts as a memory aid (Bell, 2012; Lucas, 2005; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2007) and thus will ultimately result in greater efficiency.

LANGUAGE PLAY AND FORMULAIC LANGUAGE AMONG ADULTS/ADOLESCENTS VERSUS CHILDREN

The study of language play among children has a much longer tradition than among adults, but early work tended to focus on L1 learners, with L2 learners receiving more attention only in recent years. Formulaic sequences and language play are quite common and appear to be closely linked in children—both L1 and L2 learners—from an early age. For young L2 learners, in particular, formulaic language is a rich resource for language play, providing children with slots that can be filled in unorthodox ways, allowing them an opportunity for both practice and analysis. On the other side of the coin, for these learners, language play may function as a way of building up formulaic sequences through experimentation.

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Often—perhaps more often than for adults—such play occurs as private speech (Lantolf, 1997). Examples of play with formulaic sequences can be found in Cekaite and Aronsson (2004, 2005), Kim and Kellogg (2007), Lytra (2007), Howard (2009), Wang and Hyun (2009), and Evaldsson and Cekaite (2010). Taken together and compared with the data reported in studies of adult L2 users, the results of these studies also suggest that, while children play with all levels of language, they may tend to engage in more play *with* language (vs. play *in* language) than adults, and particularly more phonological play. Recent work also shows young L2 learners playfully exploiting formulaic sequences to achieve a wide range of social actions (DaSilva Iddings & McCafferty, 2007; Evaldsson & Cekaite, 2010; Lytra, 2007). Finally, although play activities tend to be more common in classrooms with younger learners, Gardner (2008) provided one of the few descriptions of such an activity that involves play with formulaic language. Gardner observed a kindergarten teacher who transformed a traditional literacy activity into a game that, in requiring the students to justify their initial formulaic responses, pushed them into creative play.

In studies of adolescents (Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Broner & Tarone, 2001; Talmy, 2010) and adults (Bell, 2012; Bushnell, 2009; Garland, 2010; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007, 2011), the performative element of play with formulas seems to become increasingly important, in contrast to the private play that may be seen more in young children. In what may be a related development, playing in the language seems to occur much more often than playing with it (Bell, 2012). Thus formulaic sequences are manipulated in the joint construction of fictionalized scenarios (e.g., imitation or creation of a particular persona or character) to a greater extent than in the construction of play with forms or semantic play. With greater life experience, older learners also have an increasingly broad range of resources from which to draw in constructing play with conventional language. For instance, both Talmy (2010) and Blackledge and Creese (2009) documented L2 students mocking lower-proficiency learners through the use of formulaic utterances, such as "we no English!" (Talmy, 2010, p. 230), that index low L2 proficiency in a stigmatizing way. Similarly, adult social networks value different things from children's networks, so language play is used in the service of additional social functions. For example, Garland's (2010) study of mock translation contains examples of adult learners of Irish playing with formulaic sequences as a way of indexing their authentic relationship to the language, an example of which is provided later, in the section on identifying play with formulaic sequences.

LANGUAGE PLAY IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The scholarship cited thus far has almost exclusively involved work with oral L2 production; however, L2 language play has also attracted the interest of scholars of computer-mediated communication (CMC; Belz & Reinhardt, 2004; Kern, 2008; Kramsch, 2009; Vandergriff & Fuchs, 2009, in press; Warner, 2004). This medium affords play with new types of language, such as acronyms, emoticons, and punctuation or other symbols. Asynchronous CMC can also give learners additional

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time to construct utterances, which may allow them to be more creative in their use of language. Communicating by computer, rather than face-to-face, might encourage greater linguistic risk taking as well. Perhaps for these reasons, CMC has widely been thought to encourage play (e.g., Kern, 2008; Kramsch 2009). Yet, by comparing the same task carried out face-to-face and in a chat room, Vandergriff and Fuchs (2009) demonstrated that the medium itself does not result in a significant difference in the amount of play. However, it seems possible that the medium may encourage the playful manipulation of formulaic sequences with an eye toward constructing particular L2 identities online (Kramsch, 2009).

Although the studies already cited have largely focused on play with the L2, a second line of research has begun to examine language use while engaged in computer gaming or play in the L2. These studies seek to describe the interaction that occurs around such activities, as well as the affordances this type of interaction offers language learners. Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009b), for instance, documented the use of other-repetition as a resource for participation by L2 users of English in a game with English voiceovers and narration. The young players in their study performed direct repetitions of characters' phrases (e.g., *piece of cake*) and also recontextualized characters' utterances, using them appropriately in new situations, sometimes even expanding upon them. Similarly, Zheng, Young, Wagner, and Brewer (2009) demonstrated how a new formulaic phrase ("hang on") was noticed and subsequently used by a Chinese learner of English during online collaborative game-play with an English-speaking peer in the United States.

Leppanen and Piirainen-Marsh's (2009) examination of the playful practice of fan fiction writing also demonstrates how L2 users play in English, through repetition and imitation of character utterances. They also found play with English, as writers manipulate typical formulas that are used in the games they write about, allowing them to parody that language. For additional work in this vein, see Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009a), Piirainen-Marsh (2010), and Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009). Having surveyed recent research, in the next two sections I address issues that researchers in this area will need to consider. I first discuss the challenges identifying play with formulas and finally turn to areas for future research.

IDENTIFYING L2 PLAY WITH FORMULAIC LANGUAGE

Both play and formulaic language can be difficult to identify, and examining the two together potentially complicates the situation even more. With respect to language play, Cook (2000) advocated looking for certain formal, semantic, and pragmatic features to identify the phenomenon. Examples of formal features might include repetition and pattern creation; semantic features include ambiguity and construction of alternate realities; and pragmatic features can be markers of performance or language that clearly functions to increase either intimacy or aggression. To identify formulaic language, Wray (2008) advocated the use of intuition as a first step and then proposed 11 criteria for evaluating intuitive judgments. Two of these criteria, as noted in the introduction, provide

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for the linking of both language play and formulaic language. Wray's criteria are also intended to be applied with a wide variety of speakers of varying degrees of fluency and proficiency, including nonnative speakers. For instance, criterion J allows the analyst to name a string as formulaic, based on intuition, but to also assess it as unintentionally misapplied to the context. Identifying both play and formulaicity creates new challenges. Is a formula being accidentally misapplied or intentionally played with? Interlocutor reaction is not necessarily going to help, as language play by L2 users is regularly misconstrued as error (e.g., Prodromou, 2007). Looking at a few examples will help illustrate the issues involved. The first example comes from a 1998 recording between two high-intermediate L2 users of English and their American interviewer, taken from unpublished data collected as part of a dissertation study (Salsbury, 2000). The three had been discussing U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and especially the possibility of a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 1998. The interaction between the interviewer and one of the interviewees, who was from the Middle East, had become somewhat heated when the following took place:

Int:	ah, I'm playing the devil's advocate (.) I may agree with you in part.
Moussa:	yeah, I know you know (.) I don't have any idea (.) but Saddam is bad, bad boy.

Moussa's description of Saddam Hussein as a "bad, bad boy" seems clearly to be language play, demonstrating his understanding that this particular formulaic sequence, one that is normally used to refer to children, is unusual here. It would be difficult to argue that this is an error, as Moussa was well beyond the stage of learning where everyday language and terminology is something he struggled with. Similarly, given the uncomfortable amount of tension that had developed between the other two participants, it seems likely that this utterance was constructed intentionally, with the goal of lightening the atmosphere, which indeed it succeeded in doing, as the conversation turned to other topics. Not all sequences are as easy to identify and analyze.

Another previously unpublished example from Salsbury's (2000) corpus, also involving Moussa, shows how the situation can quickly become more complex. Here Moussa described how his strategies for learning English have changed over time:

Moussa:	yeah yeah yeah I took time slow by slow slow
Int:	right =
Moussa:	= go step by step =
Int:	= right =
Moussa:	= go step by step but now it different I have to, (laughs) I have to work hard to know English

Wray (2008) noted that examples with errors, as Moussa's "slow by slow" seems to be, need special handling and should be assessed partly on the basis of attested forms in the data and partly on the basis of the form being targeted. It seems clear that Moussa's use of "slow by slow" was built on the formulaic sequence he used subsequently, "step by step." He might even have been thinking of "little by little" and thus drawing on a broader hypothesis in which "x by x"

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is a sequence that can be manipulated in a variety of ways to describe things that take place slowly. However, is it play? Did Moussa intentionally manipulate this sequence in a nonserious way? These things are more difficult to ascertain. Neither he nor the interviewer take that sequence up playfully; however, neither does Moussa's change to "step by step" seem to be repair. The tone of the conversation is generally pleasant and light-hearted, but not overtly marked as play. Furthermore, taken from Lantolf's (1997) view of play as private speech, it does not seem too far afield to suggest that Moussa's formulation could have been a type of rehearsal. In addition, it is certainly not unheard of for individuals to engage in language play that their interlocutor will not understand and that is intended only for the speaker's own private enjoyment.

Code-switching and translations can also be cues to play, but they may also add an additional layer of complexity to the identification of formulaic language. In the following example, adapted from Garland (2010, p. 33), Candice guessed at the formulation of "cool" in Irish, using mock translation:

Candice:	What's Irish for coo:l, man?
Amanda:	(laughs)
Candice:	Oh no no. don't tell me it's ten words.
T:	No.
Candice:	(laughing) Cool.
Amanda:	(laughs)
Candice:	"It is cool to me." (1.6) Or "I'm under (laughing) cool."
T:	*fionnuar*
	"cool"

Here we have play *in* the L1 (English), but also *with* the L2 (Irish). As Garland pointed out, even though Candice admitted a lack of proficiency by asking for the meaning of a word, she simultaneously demonstrated proficiency by showing knowledge of Irish constructions through her mock translation of them into literal English: In Irish, *I like* is constructed as *is good with me*. Another formulaic way of expressing emotion in Irish is to say that the emotion *is on me*. The author rightly noted that while this was play, it was impossible to identify whether Candice was playing with the *to be* + preposition formula in general, or with the "on me" one more specifically in saying that she was *under* cool. We also cannot determine whether she was deliberately manipulating these formulas (changing *with me* to *to me*, or changing *on* to *under*) or simply could not recall those forms. In either case we would identify her utterances as play; however, a deliberate transformation would signal a higher level of proficiency.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As this review has indicated, investigations into language play and formulaic language have largely taken place without reference to each other. Linguistic creativity has been a concern of scholars examining formulaic language, but largely insofar as how to treat it when identifying and defining formulaic sequences, or to consider and compare analytic versus formulaic construction

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and comprehension of utterances (i.e., Chomsky's sense of creativity in language). Similarly, those studying language play have used the manipulation of recognizably formulaic language as a marker of play, without considering the relationship between the two. Yet, this review makes clear that this relationship needs to be examined. Rich descriptions of both phenomena exist, and both areas are moving toward explanatory models. Given the close and complementary connection between the two, a unified model that articulates the relationship between the functions and processing of formulaic language and language play should be developed to explain which drives the other, or to what extent is the relationship mutual.

From both a theoretical and pedagogical perspective, L2 proficiency is one factor that needs additional investigation. The ability to use formulaic language appropriately has been recognized as an important factor in L2 proficiency; thus rather than needing to encode or decode each utterance anew, a proficient L2 user can rely on formulaic chunks. In fact, skillful use of conventional language sequences can allow a learner to outperform his or her competence (Wray, 2008). With regard to language play, Cook (2000) first suggested that it might be used to measure L2 proficiency. This idea has since received numerous mentions in the literature, but the extent to which Cook's proposal is accurate has not yet been subjected to systematic inquiry.

Still, it seems reasonable to assume that with greater proficiency will come greater control of both formulaic language and the ability to play with it. In many instances, the ability to playfully manipulate—and understand the playful manipulation of—formulaic strings will indeed demonstrate that the user is "sensitive not only to what is possible, but also what is likely" (Wray, 2008, p. 240). This ability allows the user to create or comprehend language that is "sufficiently right to be acceptable but sufficiently wrong to cause amusement" (Wray, 2008, p. 240). However, we must keep in mind that both formulaicity and play exist on continua, and it is not the case that all formulaic language is equally common, nor that all language play is equally sophisticated (Carter, 2004; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). For instance, Davies (2003) described how one beginning English learner played with the formulaic greeting *What's up?* by inverting it to ask *What's down*? This provides an example of what I have referred to as "conventional creativity" (Bell, 2005, p. 201) and suggests that not all demonstrations of ability to play with linguistic conventions will be considered on the same level.

Second language acquisition researchers regularly bemoan the lack of longitudinal studies of L2 acquisition, and indeed, this is another area in which such work would be welcome and would aid in addressing this question of proficiency. In addition, by tracing the development of language play and formulaic language, we could begin to understand the links between them and how each contributes to L2 learning. It is possible that language play can serve as evidence of the developmental path of formulaic language (cf. Durrant & Schmitt, 2010) and vice versa. This will also help in comparing age differences. Following Ellis, Simpson-Vlach, and Maynard (2008), we might ask what formulas learners play with most. Does play tend to occur more after first exposure, or only with chunks that have been firmly established as part of the learner's interlanguage? We should also

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consider whether and how this differs for various types of learners, such as classroom and naturalistic learners, or adults and children.

The study of formulaic language and L2 language play is complicated by challenges in identifying play with formulaic language versus language that is merely unusual or nonidiomatic, with no playfulness intended. Code-switching, too, complicates the landscape, as formulaic sequences from multiple languages may be combined in a single utterance. We need to examine the similarities and differences in the ways that L2 users play with formulas within and across their L1 and L2, as well as how these are played with multilingually (cf. Kramsch, 2009). This work should include more studies outside the classroom (e.g., Bell, 2005) and studies comparing play with formulaic language in a variety of contexts.

Finally, as with other aspects of L2 development, social factors should not be ignored. The most important may be the status of L2 users as such and the reception of their language use in different contexts and communities. In some situations, nonnative speakers find it difficult to participate in language play, as their manipulations of L2 conventions are often perceived as errors. Prodromou (2007) reported on one L2 speaker who felt "punished" (p. 20) when his language play was corrected. Such reactions may well inhibit further attempts at language play. Gender, too, stands out as a possibly fruitful area of investigation. Pomerantz and Bell (2007), for instance, noted tangentially that the males in their study of a Spanish as a foreign language classroom in a university clearly engaged in more language play. On the other hand, Carter (1999) mentioned that in the CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) corpus of L1 data, women seem to be more creative . Both of these comments focus on language play, but in both instances we can wonder what the relationship was between language play and formulaic sequences.

Among the current perspectives on L2 development, complexity or dynamic systems theory (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; van Geert, 2008; Verspoor, de Bot, & Lowie, 2011), as well as emergentism (e.g., Ellis, 2008; O'Grady, Lee, & Kwak, 2009) each provide an appropriate lens through which to examine questions surrounding the twin phenomena of formulaic language and language play. Other approaches could, however, be used to examine the topic should scholars take an interest. Research that takes seriously the relationship between language play and formulaic language promises to lead us to a better understanding of language itself, as well as of language learning.

NOTE

1 In the October 25, 2011, episode of the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, for example, Barack Obama got laughs from the audience when he explained that he had not been watching the Republican primary debates, as he was waiting until "everybody's voted off the island."

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Evaldsson, A.-C., & Cekaite, A. (2010). "'Schwedis' he can't even say Swedish": Subverting and reproducing institutionalized norms for language use in multilingual peer groups. *Pragmatics*, *20*, 587–604.

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This article represents a continuation of the excellent work coming out of Sweden on multilingual language play, identity construction, and socialization among children (e.g., Cekaite & Aronsson, 2004, 2005; Evaldsson, 2005). The data, analyzed through the lens of conversation analysis, are drawn from a long-term ethnographic investigation of two Swedish elementary school contexts, both made up of a multiethnic, primarily immigrant population. Here the authors reported on the ways in which language minority children in these contexts used utterances that deviate from standard Swedish to tease their peers, thereby reinforcing monolingual norms. At the same time, they exploited minority languages to circumvent and subvert classroom sanctions against the use of so-called bad (i.e., insulting, sexist, threatening) language. The examples presented in this article are particularly illustrative of what Carter (2004) called pattern-forming play, where speakers align themselves over time through their playful repetition and recycling of various forms.

Garland, J. (2010). "I am under cool": Humorous mock translation as a claim to expertise in an Irish language class. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, *4*, 27–44.

In this excellent article the author examined how humorous displays of knowledge about L2 formulaic sequences are exploited as a way of demonstrating expertise in and authentic knowledge of the L2. The adults in the classroom under investigation were learning Irish, and approximately half of them were from Ireland, while the other half represented a mix of international visitors. As the title suggests, students often engaged in "mock translation," providing literal English translations of Irish expressions. Such activity was used both as a way of mitigating the face-threat brought on by lack of linguistic knowledge, as well as to display their knowledge of Irish even when they were missing particular words or structure. One example from this article is provided in the preceding text.

Gardner, S. (2008). Transforming talk and phonics practice: Or, how do crabs clap? *TESOL Quarterly*, *42*, 261–284.

With public school reforms that increasingly regiment teachers' days, script their language, and limit their autonomy, this description of how one teacher transformed a traditional literacy activity designed for native English-speaking students into one that helped her language minority students should be of interest. For the activity, students were given cards labeled "yes" on one side and "no" on the other. The original activity asked them to quickly decode a yes or no question, many of which would be considered silly (e.g., "Do slugs swing?"), and hold up the side of the card that represented their answer. The teacher altered this work with formulaic sequences by requiring the children to justify their responses, and in doing so, transformed the activity into a game. As the children took ownership of the game, they continued to develop it, playing with language more and in increasingly sophisticated ways. Gardner suggested that not only did altering task into a language play activity scaffold their L2 development, but it also opened up for them new, empowering ways of seeing language and learning.

Kim, Y.-H., & Kellogg, D. (2007). Rules out of roles: Differences in play language and their developmental significance. *Applied Linguistics*, *28*, 25–45.

This research, too, examines children's L2 use and development, and it is particularly important to this review as the only work that explicitly addresses the links among formulaic language, language play, and L2 development. Kim and Kellogg compared the quality of language that emerges in two different types of play: role-plays and rule-based games. They demonstrate how, in role-plays, young Korean learners of English tended to produce less complex language and more dispreferred responses.

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Rule-based games, on the other hand, encouraged more discourse complexity and bound initiates.

Lytra, V. (2008). Playful talk, learners' play frames and the construction of identities. In M. Martin-Jones, A. M. de Mejia, & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education: Vol. 3. Discourse and education* (pp. 185–197). New York, NY: Springer.

Although formulaic language is not part of this contribution, Lytra provided a useful review of recent and foundational scholarship relating to language play. The review is limited to research that took an ethnographic or social interactionist perspective on language play and identity; however, this is not a shortcoming, as this type of work represents the majority of research on the topic.

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