



Formulaic Language as a Model for Learners of English and Irish as Additional Languages in Early Childhood

Anna Marie Dillon

Independent researcher, Ireland and United Arab Emirates

Abstract

Formulaic language and routines have been highlighted as providing a clear model to young children for the use of new structures and vocabulary in a variety of contexts. Tabors says that observers have noted that when young second-language learners begin to use their new language, they use telegraphic speech and formulaic speech (2008, p. 55). According to Wray (2002a, p. 4) “Words and word strings which appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition are termed formulaic”. She considers that formulaic language use is caused by the heavy mental demands of speaking. Speakers seem to rely on ‘chunks’ of language that come ready made as they are easier to formulate than sentences composed of fresh words and phrases. Vignettes referred to throughout the paper are drawn from a study where three learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and learners of Irish (Gaelic) as an additional language were closely observed over ten sessions in a Junior Infant (KG) classroom in an Irish primary school. The use of formulaic language when speaking is evident throughout the observation sessions and as early as Observation 2 the teacher uses formulaic phrases consistently in the Irish lesson. Formulaic language, providing a frame for sentence construction and environmental scaffolding appear to be of particular assistance in developing the language skills of the children observed throughout the study, both at the receptive level of Listening and as their productive language skills begin to improve during later sessions observed. Therefore a consistent approach should be borne in mind by teachers and every use should be made of stories with repetition and language games to reinforce language in different contexts. This approach may equally be applied in the Arabic-speaking context and is an area that warrants further research.

Keywords: formulaic language, early childhood education, scaffolding, EAL, bilingual learners

CONTEXT

The Council of Europe considers the primary school to be the keystone of language learning in the education system (2008, p. 52). It is acknowledged that in an Irish context “One of the main challenges facing teachers and schools is supporting learners from a wide range of diverse backgrounds whose first language is not the language of

instruction" (NCCA, 2005, p. 162). The plurilingual nature of education for children speaking languages other than English as L1 is a relatively recent Irish phenomenon.

The increased migration that took place in Ireland was at its height in the mid-2000's as employment opportunities were opened up and increased mobility in the European Union became the norm. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2012) the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland grew from 224,261 persons in 2002 to 544,357 in 2011, an increase of 143 per cent over the nine year period. In 2002, the percentage of residents who were non-Irish nationals was 5.8% while by 2011 this had grown to 12%. Recent years have seen a continuing increase in the Polish population but people from 199 nations were represented in Ireland by April 2011, the date of the last census (CSO, 2012). These nationalities are of course present in primary schools and secondary schools. This has contributed significantly to the "broadening of cultural diversity spanning traditions and languages from around the world", according to the DES (Department of Education and Science). The Council of Europe acknowledges that while this increases the language resources on which Ireland can capitalise, it has transformed many mainstream schools to plurilingual micro-communities (2008, pp. 11-12) as well as putting pressure on an over-loaded education system in terms of demand for English as an Additional Language (NCCA, 2010). The migrant workers and students that have been attracted to Ireland in increasing numbers have made a "unique contribution to our community" (DES Press Release, 2005). It is also important to note that Irish (Gaelic) is a compulsory subject for all children at primary school level and can be considered an additional L2 or an L3 for the children referred to in this study.

EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

Child language research often carries with it the argument of nature versus nurture, which has been brought forward from the debates in Greek philosophy. The Platonic interpretation is that language is *phýsei* (originated from nature), while the opposing Aristotelian view is that language is *thései* (occurs because of man's determination). Stern and Stern put forward a 'convergence theory' which explored the extent to which "...inner tendencies and forces take an active part in the adoption, choice and processing of forms which are offered from the outside" (Stern and Stern, 1928, p. 128 in Oksaar, 1983, p. 8).

The language system used by adults is often taken as the measure and goal of child language acquisition (Oksaar, 1983, p. 51). However, it is not correct to judge the linguistic competence of the child against adult models. The features which child language acquisition has in common with the spoken language of adults cannot be clearly distinguished by comparing both models with each other. Therefore, researchers must be very careful in making normative comparisons between adult and child language. Children use words in speech long before they have a full understanding of what they are, and although children may use the same words as adults, they may not hold the same meanings for those words (Locke, 1993; Vygotsky 1978). The NCCA

acknowledges that learning a first language is a complex and incremental process, and that language development is generally nurtured by primary caregivers (2006, p. 7).

Children come into L2 learning with differently developed skills and learning abilities in L1. According to Cameron:

By the age of five, individual differences in language domains will be established and so, for example, some children will find it easier to learn vocabulary than others, or children with more developed conversational skills may transfer these to the new language more easily than others (2001, p. 12).

It is therefore likely that children will learn different things from the same language lesson and that different aspects of language will have different ZPDs for each child. Saville-Troike found that among three- and four-year-old Chinese learners, their L2 was largely something to play with (2006, p. 114). For slightly older children of five years of age, English was used more to comment about ongoing events e.g. a Japanese learner of English as L2 practised grammar drills privately. Her research showed that even when these children were not interacting with others, they were using intrapersonal interaction in “an active process of engagement with the input they heard, practicing to build up their competence” (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 115).

Tabors (2008) outlines a consistent developmental sequence for young children in learning a second language. They may begin by continuing to use their L1 in the L2 situation. They then typically enter a nonverbal period during which time they collect information about the L2 and engage in private speech. They then begin to go public with language by using individual words and phrases in the L2, typically telegraphic and formulaic phrases. Finally, they begin to develop productive use of the L2 (2008, p. 37). She makes the point that children learning a second language do not move discretely from one period to the next but rather add skills to each level of language use (2008, p. 64). De Houwer notes in a discussion of emerging bilinguals that the milestones of L2 development tend to follow the same order as that for L1, with comprehension preceding production, followed by babbling, then single-word utterances, then two-word utterances, followed by multiword utterances and multiclausal ones (2006, p. 782).

Although much communicative competence is acquired in the L1 by the age of five, formal literacy skills are still in the early stages of development by the age of five or six (Cameron, 2001, p. 11). Discourse skills continue to develop in the L1 throughout the early school years. Much importance is attached to the use of story-telling in foreign language teaching and second language teaching. Therefore, teachers should remember that the use of pronouns, for example, may still be difficult to use in order to control reference to characters in children using that language in L1 and we should not demand unreasonable skills from children learning that language as L2. Burling makes a similar point when referring to children of 5, and even older, who have difficulty in interpreting

passives and some relative clauses, as well as pronouns (2002, pp. 304-305). Cameron says that native speakers of English have about four or five thousand word families by the age of five, and add a further thousand to their repertoire each year (2001, p. 75). Nation and Waring (1997) note that learners of EAL who attend English-speaking school have also been found to add about one thousand word families to their repertoire each year but the gap of four to five thousand still remains. In fact, it may take 5-7 years for L2 learners to “approximate native speakers’ norms” (Collier, 1989, cited in Grant, 1995, p. 4). The following quotation concurs with Cameron’s observation: “Children may become conversationally fluent in a new language in two or three years but may take five or more years to catch up with monolingual peers in cognitive and academic language” (PNS, 2007, p. 5). Cummins (2008) has long implored that at least 5 years are typically required for newcomers to catch up academically. This literature will have implications for Language Support received by newcomer migrant children and the expectations for children learning English as an additional language in their home country.

FORMULAIC LANGUAGE

Ullman (2008), in a discussion of the nature of the brain in SL learning, drew a distinction between declarative memory and procedural memory. This is similar to Baetens Beardsmore’s (2008) ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ distinction mentioned in the discussion of plurilingualism. One of his findings is that females tend to do better at learning chunks of language, which is linked to declarative memory, and males tend to learn procedurally, involving more the theory of language.

According to Littlewood (1984, p. 47), “learners construct systems of rules from which they can create utterances”. These systems may include learning grammatical morphemes, learning to form negatives, learning to form questions, and learning the basic sentence pattern. Another aspect of language learning is memorising unanalysed formulas and patterns. According to Wood, “multi-word sequences can be stored in the same way as individual lexical items” (2001, p. 579). These are sometimes known as ‘routine formulas’ and ‘prefabricated frames’ or ‘patterns’ or ‘formulaic language units’ (ibid.; Tabors, 2008; Wray, 2002a, 2002b). Tabors says that observers have noted that when young second-language learners begin to use their new language, they use telegraphic speech and formulaic speech (2008, p. 55). Telegraphic speech is explained as referring “to the use of a few content words as an entire utterance; this type of speech is also typical of a period of acquisition by very young children learning their first language” (Tabors, 2008, p. 56). In the case of a routine formula, the learner produces an utterance as “[...] a single, unanalysed unit, rather than creating it from underlying rules” (Littlewood, 1984, p. 47). Examples include “Don’t do that” or “Get out of here”. A prefabricated pattern is similar to a routine formula, but allows a certain degree of creativity. Hakuta (1976) studied a Japanese child who was able to use the pattern “I know how to...” with various items in the final slot and according to Tabors (2008), Wong-Fillmore (1976) found evidence in her PhD thesis for the breaking up of

routine formulas and prefabricated patterns in the speech of a Spanish child. As the child's knowledge of the L2 increases, so too does her flexibility and creativity and so formulaic phrases eventually interweave with newly constructed segments of language as fluency develops (Wood, 2001, p. 580; Wray, 2002b, p. 114). The formulaic phrases that were commonly used by the second-language learners in Tabors' research early in the acquisition process were high utility words such as yes, no, hi, bye-bye, excuse me and I don't know (2008, p. 58) and were found to be very useful in social situations in the classroom.

According to Wray (2002a, p. 4) "Words and word strings which appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition are termed formulaic". She considers that formulaic language use is caused by the heavy mental demands of speaking. Speakers seem to rely on 'chunks' of language that come ready made as they are easier to formulate than sentences composed of fresh words and phrases. 'Chunks' can be useful in talk by providing a framework for speech, with 'slots' that can be filled. Vocabulary development is about learning words, formulaic phrases or chunks, finding words inside those chunks, and learning more about words. Infants, adults and children know and talk about words and think of a word as a discrete unit. Tabors noted that

The second-language learners were usually quite quick in their acquisition of at least a limited range of telegraphic and formulaic phrases that helped them socially in the classroom, and they were usually right about the situations in which the phrases could be used (1997, p. 64).

While these phrases were at first used most often by the children in communicating with other adults and speakers of EAL, they also provided opportunities for these children to begin interacting verbally with their English-speaking peers in the classroom.

Many course books for young learners choose conversational phrases as individual units of language to be taught. These phrases are taught through songs, rhymes, stories and indeed, normal classroom language (Cameron, 2001, p. 50). Mhic Mhathúna (2008) found in a study of Irish-language preschools that having learned words in the context of lunchtime routines, the 3 and 4 year old children were able to extend their knowledge of the words within a storytelling session. For the most part, the phrases remained as formulaic units (2008, p. 303). If children are listening to a story told from a 'big book' with pictures, rather than text, they may understand the general meaning of the story. However, they may not be able to explain the story in their L2, because their attention has been focused on the meaning, rather than vocabulary or syntax. Field (1998) reminds us that "different types of listening activities are required to ensure a language-focus" (Cameron, 2001, p. 40). However, Tabors says that as soon as children learning EAL have acquired a number of useful phrases and vocabulary items, they can begin building their own sentences resulting in productive language use, rather than relying on formulaic phrases (2008, p. 59).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Purpose/ Rationale

In order to address the main research question relating to the interactional modifications made by teachers in the mainstream classroom for supporting children with EAL in their L2 and L3 learning, it was decided to conduct classroom observation in a Junior Infant classroom over a period of three months. As part of this observation, formulaic language played a large part in input and interaction in the classroom. According to Edwards (2001, p. 126), “cases are often referred to as units of analysis, the bounded systems which we explore in our study”. Case study research focuses on a particular interest in individual cases (Stake, 1994; Cregan, 2007). A case study can often provide a detailed snapshot of a system in action. In the case of the present study, case studies have been selected as examples of the “phenomena occurring more widely” (Edwards, 2001, p. 126). The interpretive design of this particular case study seeks to present analytical descriptions based on observation and reflection of particular cases (Faltis, 1997; Cregan, 2007).

As well as focusing on the interactional modifications made by the teacher in supporting all of the children with EAL, it was decided to observe in detail the three children who were monolingual in their home language prior to starting school and to document their language acquisition skills over the three month period. It was decided to observe these children as these were the type of children who had been profiled in the questionnaire as part of a broader mixed methods study, and the type of children who had prompted much of the conversation during focus group interviews.

Therefore the main focus of classroom observation was to observe the types of scaffolding evident in a classroom with a significant number of children speaking EAL in a single-stream Junior Infant classroom. Formulaic language formed a significant part of this scaffolding.

Some results from the above-mentioned questionnaire will be discussed as part of the findings. It should be noted that the purpose of one section of the questionnaire was to gain a profile of individual children in terms of their English and Irish language ability by the end of Junior Infants. There were ninety-nine respondents who responded to nominal scales leading to categorical data. Teachers gave an individual pupil profile based on the European Language Portfolio checklist for English language (Listening and Speaking) and the achievement of content objectives for Gaeilge (Listening and Speaking) in the Irish language curriculum (NCCA, 1999).

Sample

The school was identified by the researcher while engaged with supervision of Teaching Practice (TP). Through her position supervising TP in a wide variety of schools in the south of Ireland over a number of years, it had become apparent to the researcher

which types of schools would be most conducive to conducting classroom observation to investigate the research question under investigation. Therefore, use was made of purposive sampling. Bryman (2004, p. 333) acknowledges that such sampling is strategic and attempts to establish coherence between research questions and sampling. When such a school was identified an appointment was made with the principal to discuss the possibility of conducting research in a Junior Infant classroom. Some of the criteria were as follows:

- That the class teacher be at least probated and preferably have at least three years experience of teaching any class level.
- That the class teacher be agreeable to being observed from the beginning of the academic year.
- That parents would be informed of the research being conducted.
- That there would be a relatively high proportion of children speaking languages other than English in the classroom and at least one child speaking no English at all upon commencing school.
- That the class be either single stream Junior Infants or at most Junior and Senior Infants combined.
- That it take no longer than thirty minutes to travel by car to the observation site due to teaching commitments of the researcher.

Five such schools were identified. The one chosen was deemed as the most appropriate school as it fulfilled all of the criteria. Mrs Smith (the class teacher – pseudonym) was enthusiastic about the research and also had the full support of Mr Potts (the school principal – pseudonym). The longitudinal research which was carried out over a period of three months meant that change and connections could be observed (Bryman, 2004) and in fact this research aims to examine the language skills of ELLs and the interactional modifications made by their teacher over a short but critical period of time.

Formal observation took place on ten separate occasions between September and December for between sixty minutes and ninety minutes each time for a total of 690 minutes (eleven and a half hours). Most of the classroom observation was done on Mondays as it suited the teacher and the researcher. According to Seedhouse (2004, p. 87) “classroom research [...] has considered between five and ten lessons a reasonable database”. A wide range of subject areas was observed including Mathematics, English, Irish, Science and Music as well as activities such as sand and water play, computer time, library time and play in the home corner. During observations detailed field notes were written. Any interactions between the class teacher and any of the three children with EAL were noted. All instructions given by the teacher to the class as a whole were noted, and any interactions between the children with EAL, each other and their classmates were noted along with any interactions between the researcher and the children. Each day almost immediately after observation had taken place, field notes were transcribed.

Reliability and Validity

Edwards (2001) tells us that cases that are selected as exemplary “have the potential to tell us more about a wider population than might be gleaned in a survey”. However, similarly to focus group discussions, a case study approach does mean that results “may not be generalised beyond the immediate cases that are examined” (Cregan, 2007, p. 38). Bryman reminds us that it is not easy to achieve reliability in observation, especially because of the effects of factors such as “observer fatigue and lapses in attention” (2004, p. 174).

One procedure to be followed in doing the report is to have the draft report reviewed by the participants and informants, according to Yin (2009, p. 182). He advises that “From a methodological standpoint, the corrections made through this process will enhance the accuracy of the case study, hence increasing the construct validity of the study” (2009, p. 183). To this end, Mrs Smith and Mr Potts, the classroom teacher and school principal of the target school were invited to review the final version of the draft, although they did not add any further comments or corrections.

Analysis

There are a number of approaches available for investigating interaction in the classroom including interaction analysis, discourse analysis and conversation analysis. It was decided to work within the interaction analysis framework in order to explore the interactional modifications made by teachers for supporting children with EAL in their L2 and L3 learning. A system-based approach such as FIAC (Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories) or COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) may be employed by some researchers (Walsh, 2006, p. 42). Aspects of the Irish Lesson Analysis System (Harris and Murtagh, 1999) were considered when exploring the possibility of using a formal observation record as this does define lesson segments in terms of five main dimensions of analysis, some of which would be of relevance to this study. However for the purposes of the current study, it was decided to adopt an ad hoc or flexible approach to classroom observation, thereby allowing for less structured observation in order to cope with the “... constraints of a particular context” (Walsh, 2006, p. 44); in this case, the Junior Infant classroom. Most importantly in the context of this research “ad hoc interaction analysis allows attention to be devoted to the microcosms of interactions that might so easily be missed by the ‘broad brush’ descriptions provided by systems-based approaches” (Walsh, 2006, p. 44). Bryman identifies this as ‘ad libitum’ sampling, whereby the researcher records whatever is happening at the time (2004, p. 172). The transcriptions were analysed using the long-table approach in that each observation was combed through manually for emerging themes and approaches by the teacher.

To begin with, a note was taken of each ten-minute period during the observation period and field notes were transcribed as such. Upon rewriting the field notes, they were divided into lesson sections and rewritten so that the description of each lesson

was separate from the individual interactions. While undertaking this detailed transcription, as soon as possible after each session, notes were made in the margins about the types of language used by the teacher and children in an effort to start grouping interactions thematically arising from scaffolding categories derived from interactional features. Initially, these notes were based primarily on Walsh (2006) and Saville-Troike (2006).

Walsh's categories of interactional features are based on teacher talk and include scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, referential questions, seeking clarification, extended learner turn, teacher echo, teacher interruptions, extended teacher turn, turn completion, display questions and form-focused feedback (2006, p. 167). These categories were very helpful to start off with but failed to take into account many of the children's turns and classroom events. Furthermore, scaffolding as a standalone category in Walsh's grid was deemed too general a category as many of the other features of teacher talk listed are types of scaffolding. As the intention was to look at interactions between the teacher and children, it was decided to utilise Saville-Troike's types of interactional modifications, which certainly does not claim to be exhaustive. Her types include repetition, paraphrase, expansion and elaboration, sentence completion, frame for substitution, vertical construction and comprehension check and request for clarification (2006, p. 109). These also proved to be most useful in conjunction with Walsh's categories.

In order to take the most relevant of the categories for grouping interactions thematically, Tabors (2008) offers a range of ideas for communicating with second-language-learning children in the classroom. These ideas include advice for interactional scaffolding and environmental scaffolding such as the following: starting with what the children know, starting slowly, buttressing communication, repetition, talking about the here and now, expanding and extending, upping the ante, fine-tuning, combining techniques, providing safe havens, classroom routines, small-group activities to ensure inclusion and social support i.e. getting help from the English-speaking children (Tabors, 2008, pp. 89-101). The transcriptions were re-read using these ideas as a framework for analysis and in combination with Walsh and Saville-Troike, outlined above, a framework emerged bearing in mind the literature on scaffolding. Table 1 outlines the framework for analysis used.

Table 1. Framework for Analysis - Classroom Observation

Interactional scaffolding	Environmental scaffolding
- Starting with what the children know; allowing use of L1	- Classroom routines: Helping children become members of the group
- Starting slowly	- Small-group activities: Ensuring inclusion
- Buttressing communication	- Social support: getting help from the English-speaking children.
- Repetition	
- Talking about the here and now	
- Expanding and extending	

FINDINGS

The findings regarding formulaic language will be discussed with reference to a self-assessment teachers conducted with speakers of home languages other than English as part of the wider study. Assessment levels are referring to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages rating scales, ranging from A1 (lowest) to C2 (highest) (Council of Europe, 2001).

The use of formulaic language when speaking is evident throughout the observation sessions and as early as Observation 2 Mrs Smith uses formulaic phrases consistently in the Irish lesson, asking a question such as '*Céard é seo?*' {What is this?} to elicit a response such as '*Seo (item)*' {This is a/ an (item)}. The use of formulaic language appears more consistently from the perspective of the children as their productive language skills begin to improve during later sessions observed. By Observation 6 Jack is able to respond to '*Cé leis é?*' {Who does this belong to?} correctly with no prompting. By Observation 9 he is able to say the whole sentence '*An bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leithreas?*' {May I have permission to go to the toilet?} correctly and without prompting. This formulaic phrase has assisted him in making himself understood in his L3.

The CEFR/ ELP (European Language Portfolio) ratings for Listening, Spoken Production and Spoken Interaction gathered for this study indicated that many pupils were achieving at the highest level of B1 with no help at all by the end of Junior Infants, but that they tended to score highest in the receptive skill of Listening. The same could be said for children profiled by teachers and those observed, although observation did elucidate the fact that while a child could be ranked at one level he/ she may occasionally be able to achieve at a higher level. High utility formulaic phrases encouraged by the teacher appeared to be those of most use to the children observed in this study in terms of promoting their Speaking skills, as well as the teacher ensuring the highest levels of comprehension by not imposing language but rather co-constructing language through negotiation of meaning.

Observation 8 sees a Jack where gestures and sounds are used by Mrs Smith where appropriate when explaining new words such as reindeer. He also shows when reading out a story through pictures and flashcards (a story co-constructed during a previous lesson by Mrs Smith and the children) that he needs initial letter sounds as prompts from time to time but also supplies many of the phrases himself. He utilises the formulaic phrases and even attempts to create his own 'Welcome baby welcome'. During Observation 9 Jack appears to be a little tired, particularly at the beginning. Jack is the fourth child to be asked to say what all the items on the page are, thereby highlighting the teacher's awareness of preparing the child for participation.

When Eugene comes in late during Observation 5 he says 'Hi' to the researcher and Mrs Smith at the door. In the Reading Corner, the researcher points to the dress on the page and he says '*Sin gúna*' {That is a dress}. Eugene is looking at a slide-out book and calls Mrs Smith over by saying 'Teacher look'. All of these instances are examples of Eugene

initiating communication himself. He is able to use formulaic phrases and put together his own short sentences. He is also able to use the formulaic words and phrases 'please' and 'thank you', as indicated at the Sand Tray and Water Station, although he does forget to use the words from time to time and grabs tools from other children.

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire reported their pupils with EAL as finding the curricular content objectives concerned with listening to Irish being spoken regularly in order to reinforce particular phrases and listening to poems, rhymes, stories and action songs the easiest listening skills to achieve. Classroom observation of Peter shows similar results. The activities that Peter engaged with most meaningfully from an early stage were poems, rhymes and action songs such as his non-verbal engagement with the rhymes '*Hata beag dearg*' {Little red hat} during Observation 2 and '*Plip plop plí*' {onomatopoeic – no translation} and '*Cuir ort do chóta*' {Put on your coat} during Observation 4, thereby allowing himself to be a part of the group actively engaged in listening but not quite ready to verbalise yet. Cameron (2001) and Mhic Mhathúna (1995; 2008) refer to the power of these types of activities in extending the child's knowledge and understanding of words due to their formulaic nature.

The next most achievable curriculum target was the content objective regarding making an attempt to speak Irish. Peter and Jack show themselves as willing to do this as early as Observation 1 when they both respond to the question '*Cé tusa?*' {Who are you?} correctly, given enough time by the teacher to prepare for participation, this being an early example of formulaic language providing a frame for sentence construction (Saville-Troike, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Similarly to their English language skills, children tended to score higher in Irish in the receptive skill of Listening rather than the productive one of Speaking in this study and those objectives which were seen as easily achievable by children profiled by their teachers through the questionnaire were also evidently more easily achievable by those children observed in Mrs Smyth's classroom. These skills included most frequently listening to poems, rhymes, stories and action songs (receptive) and reciting rhymes with repetition and singing songs (productive) and so were similar for both strands of the curriculum. Formulaic language and providing a frame for sentence construction seemed to be of particular assistance in developing the language skills of the children observed throughout the study, both at the receptive level of Listening and as their productive language skills began to improve during later sessions observed. Although the *Primary Curriculum Review Phase II* (NCCA, 2008) did not give details for Infant classes specifically, the content objectives for Listening and Speaking highlighted as those most easily achievable by children with EAL as part of the current research also featured as those aspects that were easiest or most pleasant to teach within the aforementioned document. As children tended to score higher on receptive rather than productive skills, every effort should be made to support their receptive language skills

while promoting their Spoken Production and Spoken Interaction skills. The use of formulaic language was noted as being of benefit in this regard and therefore mainstream teachers and Language Support teachers or co-teachers should collaborate wherever possible to ensure that telegraphic and formulaic language can be produced by children with their joint assistance.

An interesting finding from the study was that many observations were made of the children speaking in Irish as well as in English. Indeed, during some observation sessions the children spoke considerably more Irish than English. This corroborates findings in the same study where most of the comments made by teachers during focus group interviews on the children's ability to acquire Irish were positive, in line with the Council of Europe's expectations (2008) and Cummins's observations (2008). Some teachers interviewed did note the type of confusion that can occur between Irish and English, and the fact that the children distinguish between English and Irish, calling Gaeilge the 'other English'. This is a point worth highlighting and has implications for the tendency of the children and teacher observed to engage in code-switching and code-mixing. Mhic Mhathúna (1995) and Wong-Fillmore (1985) note the fact that children can tell the difference between languages and develop expectations regarding which one should be used in which situation. Responsible and reflective code-switching within a language lesson (Garcia, 2009) or indeed any spoken interaction can help to scaffold the TL. Its place in enhancing comprehension (Baker, 2006) is strongly acknowledged in this study.

It is apparent that the explicit use of formulaic language as comprehensible input and comprehensible output continues to have an important place in the pedagogical repertoire. This particular study highlights the part it can play in a setting where additional L2s are being learned by the child. It also reminds us that a teacher's skillful scaffolding techniques, including formulaic language, can facilitate the child's language development in a very comfortable and positive Zone of Proximal Development in the early years.

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