

Cekaite, A. & Aronsson, K. (2005). Language play, a collaborative resource in children's L2 learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 26 (2), 169-191.

### Examples of Language Play

- Play with sounds to create patterns of rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, alliteration, etc. and play with grammatical structures to create parallelisms and patterns (Jakobson 1960).
  - **Assonance**- repetition of vowel sounds:
    - "It beats... as it sweeps... as it cleans"- Hoover slogan
    - "Those images that yet/Fresh images beget,/That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea." - "Byzantium" by W.B. Yeats
  - **Consonance**- repetition of final consonant sounds
    - "Betty bought butter but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought better butter to make the bitter butter better."
  - **Alliteration**- repetition of beginning sounds
    - "Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade, He bravely breach'd his boiling bloody breast." from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"
    - "Ga Ga"- spontaneous babbling from infant
  - **Paralellisms and patterns**
    - "Doggie fall down," "Kitty fall down," "Baby fall down."- common toddler patterns
- At the semantic level, there is play with units of meaning, combining them in ways which create words which do not exist: fictions (Cook 1997: 228)
  - *Jaerwocky*, Lewis Carroll (1871)
    - 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

### **Focus of the Study**

- Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) study interactions between immersion classroom students in Sweden. They found repeated instances of form-focused language play in spontaneous conversations.
- “Explore the interactional architecture of how language learners- at the basic proficiency level- collaboratively focus on form in their everyday L2 interactions.”

### **Rationale**

- Several studies have documented spontaneous language play in the L2 acquisition of adults (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996; Sullivan 2000a, b; Ohta 2001; Belz 2002)
- Earlier research has primarily been done on language play in L1 learning

### **Method**

- Naturalistic conversations inspired by the language socialization paradigm which focuses on language learning as a social and situated phenomenon (p 172)

### **Setting**

- Immersion classroom of refugee and immigrant children in a Swedish school
- 9 students (4 girls and 5 boys) aged 7 to 10 years-old
- Class meeting 5 days a week, 4-6 hours a day
- Beginning learners recently arrived in Sweden from Lebanon, Iraq, Thailand, or Turkey (L1s of Arabic, Thai, and Kurdish)
- Swedish is official bridge language of the classroom and main language of instruction
- All but 1 student spoke Arabic, making an unofficial bridge language of the classroom
- The lead teacher is a native speaker of Swedish and the assistant teacher also spoke Arabic
- Student’s spontaneous contributions encouraged throughout class time

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### **Data**

- Recordings of children's on- and off-task interactions
- Classroom interactions and play activities were video recorded
- Three periods over the year (Beginning, Middle, and Late phase)
- 90 hours of recordings
- Analysis presented taken from the mid-phase (students had spent between 4 months and 1 year in Swedish school)

### **Analytic Unit**

- Language play sequences
- Emic perspective (approach the study in terms of its internal elements and their functioning)- participants' own orientation to something as funny
- Joking events where children laughed or commented on something as funny
- Large subset of children's spontaneous joking was based on playful mislabeling and puns, or ways of speaking which exploited linguistic ambiguity and phonological, semantic, and syntactic features of language- students exploited several dimensions of language in performing and participating in joking events
- Translations made by native speaker of English- goal to preserve the children's original style of speaking- including errors- did not include mispronunciations and gender errors ('ett fisk' vs 'en fisk')

### **Findings**

- Students, as well the teachers, initiated language play
- Joking was a way children secured the attention of their co-participants (in order to be seen and heard in a crowded classroom)
- Children's language play involved rudimentary forms of joking
- They exploited incongruities and rule distortions
- Played with language in many ways
  - producing playful nonsense variations of words
  - deliberate mislabelings, simple puns
  - sound play
  - word composition, word substitutions, word order
- Expressive means for embellishing
  - Alliterations, parallelisms, code switching, word elongations
  - onomatopoeia, loud talking, laughing and repetitions

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### **Conclusions**

- Spontaneous language play included
  - 'spoken artistry'
  - Cross-utterance poetics
    - Spontaneous parallelisms across turns
      - Rhyming, Rhythmically tuned responses, Varied intonational patterns
      - Sing-song, Onomatopoeics, Voice modulations
  - Attention to language form
    - Promote the learner's awareness of phonology and morphology of correct and incorrect language choices
  - Instances of serious and non-serious peer teaching
    - Repair work, word definitions, and explanations of language use
    - Opportunities for 'pushed output'
- Form-focused
  - Resembled language drills, Authentic and natural, Initiated by the children
- Language play can be seen as an aspect of communicative competence