Language Play: Implications for the Second-Language Learner

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INTRODUCTION

Although humor and linguistic play are common in authentic speech and ubiquitous in the communicative classroom, language play has received little serious attention in the field of second language acquisition. The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential effects of language play upon second language acquisition in both children and adult learners. Studies by Aronsson and Cekaite (2005), Belz (2002), Bell (2005), Bongartz and Schneider (2003), Broner and Tarone (2001), Lucas (2005), Peck (1980), and Warner (2004) are reviewed. The results indicate that second language play may lead to focus on form through noticing, comparison of language forms within and between languages, and corrective feedback from interlocutors; additionally, the ability to play with language seems to be an indicator of proficiency and multicompetence and may instigate pushed output (Swain 2000).

HISTORY OF LANGUAGE PLAY

Although the implications of language play upon second language acquisition have been seriously considered only in the past quarter of a century, there has been interest in the issue for much longer. Play as it relates to children learning foreign languages was considered as early as 1901; Ashleman (1901), in her article about teaching French to English-speaking children, writes, "Games… represent the strongest interest of a little child, and permit him to grasp sentences as a

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whole" (p. 124). Her supposition might well be called an early notion of focus on form, which

Michael H. Long (1991) defines as that which draws "students' attention to linguistic elements as

they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (p. 46).

Thus, even in foreign language teaching at the early beginning of the twentieth century, the

relationship between play and focus on linguistic form was seen as a valid pedagogical concern.

In the first half of the twentieth century, a plethora of papers regarding the use of games in

language classrooms were published, touting, to various degrees, the positive effect of play upon

language learning. Chambers (1927), a high school language teacher, published a paper detailing

the rules of twenty games that could be played in a modern language classroom without the

students "moving around, disturbing other classes" (p. 2). Although his concern with keeping

students seated and relatively quiet may seem stringent by the standards of today's communicative

classrooms, his guide appears to be one of the earliest for language play in a classroom setting. In

1939, Amelia Edna Anthony published a far more passionate paper, arguing for the necessity of

play in the language classroom by tracing the philosophical argument of merging enjoyment and

education back to Plato. She contends that "games provide a most effective means of disguising

the two prime requisites of all language study, coordination and repetition" (p. 5). While Anthony

spoke from the perspective of a French teacher, Jordan (1947), nearly ten years later, published an

equally fervent paper about the advantages of using games in the German foreign language

classroom. Jordan conducted a study in which he incorporated language games into certain

sections of a beginning-level German course; he proposes that the games "helped to promote the

fluency of speech and aided in overcoming the speaking inhibition which so many students

experience in reference to foreign languages" (p. 2). He concludes his paper by politely deriding

his publishing house and "the supposed attitude of the teachers of German" for not accepting for

publication his activity book for German classrooms or embracing his opinions about the importance of language games. Indeed, the first part of the twentieth century saw an increase in the number of publications purporting the benefits of language games in the foreign language classroom. Not until the latter part of the century, though, did studies begin to arise concerning the effect of play upon language acquisition.

In one of the first significant studies concerning the effect of language play upon second language acquisition, Peck (1978) documents the spontaneous interactions between two children: one, a native speaker of English; the other, a native speaker of Spanish who was acquiring English. She found numerous instances of phonological and semantic play in the children's conversations and connected these to the Spanish speaker's acquisition of English linguistic forms. Concurrently, studies investigating the relationship between language play and first language acquisition were burgeoning and producing encouraging results. Collier (1980), in his study of elementary school children acquiring language through play, asserts that "play may be a major medium for language acquisition and development" (p. 92). Despite the growing interest in the connection between play and acquisition for children learning languages, the segue into studying adult learners did not happen for some time and as of yet has still attracted little attention in the field of second language acquisition. For this reason, I have chosen four studies of children learners and four studies of adult learners in an attempt to best draw conclusions that reflect the potential relationship of language play to second language acquisition for all age groups.

DEFINING LANGUAGE PLAY

A particular challenge in conducting studies on language play has been the procurement of an established definition. The term "language play" has been separately defined in the field of

second language acquisition by both Cook (1997) and Lantolf (1997), causing studies of play to conflict in their overlap of terminology yet dissimilarity of generated data. Cook (1997), following Jakobson (1960), defines language play as "play with sounds (or with letter shapes, though this is less common) to create patterns of rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, alliteration, etc., and play with grammatical structures to create parallelisms and patterns (p. 228); on the contrary, Lantolf (1997) adheres to a Vygotskyan perspective, describing language play as a form of private speech (Tarone & Broner, 2001). Although these definitions are ostensibly conflicting, Tarone and Broner (2001) attempted to synthesize them by "[showing] instances where, due to the multifunctionality of discourse, utterances appear to function as both fun and rehearsal" (p. 364). They conclude, however, that "it is important to maintain a distinction between the two types" (p. 376). For the purposes of this review, I will apply Cook's definition of language play as it more applicable to the studies reviewed.

CHILD SECOND LANGAUGE PLAY

Studies conducted to assess the affect of language play upon the second language acquisition of children have generally produced positive results. In her seminal study of language play and child second language acquisition, Peck (1980) proposes that ludic language play creates opportunities for practice and heightens the affective climate. Peck audio recorded the spontaneous playground interactions of two groups of children, each group composed of one native speaker of Spanish who was acquiring English and one or two native speakers of English. The primary data were collected from three sessions, totaling seventy-three minutes, and instances of language play were identified by the presence of nonliteral orientation, intrinsic motivation, and attention to linguistic and, secondarily, social rules. Nonliteral orientation, distinguished by a high

pitch and an unconcern for meaning, arose in two instances, in which the children engaged in repeating phrases in escalating pitches for no semantic purpose. The evident loudness and laughter in the exchanges create an affectively charged atmosphere, which Peck suggests might be a factor in language acquisition. Additionally, Peck identifies instances of intrinsic motivation, in which the children create a dialogue either cooperatively or competitively: in one case comparing the pronunciation of the word *darn* with that of a classmate's name, *Dong*; and in another case, contrasting the pronunciation of *pizza* and *pieces*. This playful repetition raises phonological awareness and allows for practice. Finally, attention to linguistic and social rules was apparent throughout the interactions, as the children regularly made syntactic, phonological, and lexical variations upon each other's comments and indirectly enforced the need for relevance in conversation. Peck uses Keenan's (1974) guidelines to identify instances in which one child performed a "function": the exact repetition of an utterance, a repetition with a change of intonation, a repetition with a change of one word, or the expansion of an utterance. Additionally, one child often used repetition as an attention-getting device when the other child was not being a relevant conversational partner. Peck concludes that though it cannot be ascertained that language play leads to acquisition, it may likely be a contributing factor.

Bongartz and Schneider (2003) also linked language play to practice opportunities, and hence linguistic development, in their year-long ethnographic study of two native English-speaking children acquiring German. Each researcher analyzed the data using a different framework in order to consider both the social and the linguistic domains of language learning: Bongartz analyzed the children's grammatical development using a cognitive-linguistic framework and Schneider, also the mother of the children, analyzed the children's interactional and social development using an interactionist framework. The primary data consisted of twenty-five tapes

of audio recordings of the children's spontaneous interactions with native speakers of German, ten of which were transcribed. Field notes accompanied the audio recordings, and data were triangulated by weekly language logs, classroom observations, informal interviews with teachers, and video recordings of classes. Bongartz and Schneider found that the majority of the children's interactions were playful, and thus categorized the language-related episodes according to the type of language play: sound play, characterized by nonverbal communication and paralinguistic exaggeration; word play, characterized by repetition, creativity, and rhyme; narratives, characterized by co-construction and role play; and insults, characterized by offensive or confrontational language. Through sound play, the children were able to sustain play interactions when vocabulary was lacking and enjoy experimentation with the German language. Word play allowed the children to digest routinized phrases through repetition and practice morphological competency by creating words using German affixes. Narrative play not only strengthened the relationship between the children and their native German-speaking peers, but also offered opportunities for the English-speaking children to become authorities through their assumed roles. Finally, solidarity between the children and their peers was achieved by using insults and confrontational language, such as when the younger child was able to join a conversation between older children by adding derogatory comments about Barbie. Bongartz concludes that the children's grammatical development cannot be separated from the type of interaction in which they participate, as this is what determines the linguistic forms that receive the most practice. Ultimately, the researchers suggest that language play may perhaps encourage focus on form and offer opportunities to practice using the forms in question, leading indirectly to acquisition.

In their study of nine children acquiring beginning-level Swedish in an immersion classroom, Aronsson and Cekaite (2005) found that language play led to focusing on form, peer

correction, practice, and "pushed output" (Swain 2000). Aronsson and Cekaite video recorded 90 hours of the children's on- and off-task interactions over the period of an academic year; they then coded the interactions for spontaneous joking events, identified as such by the children's laughter or verbal acknowledgements of funniness. Three categories of language play emerged from their data: mislabeling, which led to phonological and morphological play; subversion, which led to semantic play; and rudimentary puns, which led to semantic and syntactic play. Through mislabeling, the children found opportunities to experiment with morphological rules and sound play, namely phonological parallelisms and alliteration. They also demonstrated their metalinguistic awareness by either deliberately producing an incorrect form or mocking a peer's incorrect utterance, which the researchers suggest is a form of error correction. Semantic play was evident in the students' intentional mislabeling of animals in one example and gender in another; these particular joking events provoked either playful or annoyed corrections from peers. The children also participated in semantic and syntactic play by creating puns that required recognition of homonyms and homophones. Aronsson and Cekaite finally connect language play to acquisition by concluding that the children's play led to focusing on form, including the recognition of correct and incorrect forms, practice, peer correction, and also provided opportunities for "pushed output," which, according to Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, facilitates accurate language production.

In another study of children's language play in a classroom setting, Broner and Tarone (2001) analyzed the on- and off-task interactions of three children in a fifth-grade Spanish immersion classroom. Data were collected through audio recordings, procured by asking the children to wear lapel microphones for one hour a week over a period of five months. These interactions were then coded for language play used for fun (Cook, 1997) and language play used

for private speech (Lantolf, 1997), using five criteria: laughter, shifts in voice quality and volume, newness of language forms, size of audience, and the creation of fiction. They found that the children engaged in phonological, morphological, and semantic language play, often experimenting with sounds, structures, and the creation of imaginary worlds. Interestingly, using language for fun sometimes segued into repetition and rehearsal, uniting the aforementioned definitions of language play; ludic language play also resulted in peer correction, either playful or serious, and demonstrations of multicompetence, in which the L1 and the L2 were intermingled for entertainment. Broner and Tarone finally suggest three potential ways in which language play may lead to acquisition: first, since language play is "affectively changed" (p. 375), forms that are played with are more likely to be noticed; second, the creation of fictional worlds may allow speakers to acquire different registers; and third, speakers' production during language play may violate the rules of both the L1 and the L2, leading to destabilization of the interlanguage.

ADULT SECOND LANGAUGE PLAY

In studies conducted on adults, language play has been explored as it relates to acquisition and multicompetence. Belz (2002) conducted a study of 31 English-speaking adult learners of German in which the learners were asked to write a multilingual composition of 300-500 words in German and another language of their choice. Data were triangulated through voluntary interviews, surveys, journal entries, and videotaped discourse. Belz found that language play occurred at phonological, orthographic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels of linguistics; learners were able to cleverly combine English and German morphemes for the purposes of humor and creativity, and in one case, a learner blended German and English syntaxes and lexicons, essentially creating sentences that were minimal pairs, their only difference being

either the syntax or the lexicon. Additionally, the learners in this study confirmed that their code-switching was based upon deliberate choices, revealing their metalinguistic awareness. Belz concludes that language play does not appear to directly aid acquisition since the learners were using forms previously acquired, but rather may "represent and figure in the emergence of multicompetence in the learner" (p. 35). Although she acknowledges that playing with language forms may relate to the acquisition of those forms, she overtly relates her results to the development of learners' identities in a second language.

Bell (2005) attempted to link language play to second language acquisition in her study of three non-native speakers of English, but instead discovered connections between play and proficiency. Bell collected data by asking her participants, three women of different linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of proficiency, to audio record their authentic conversations with native speakers of English; she later coded the recordings for all instances of humorous dialogue to find potential correlations with acquisition and triangulated the data by conducting playback interviews with the participants. Bell found that the type of humor or word play employed by learners was contingent upon their levels of proficiency: the least proficient of the learners experimented only with double-voicing, the temporary adoption of a different register or dialect (Tarone, 2000), and using an ironic tone; the learner of intermediate proficiency was able to additionally use references to pop culture in her humor; and the most advanced learner was able to creatively experiment with linguistic forms. Bell also found instances when a humorous sequence of dialogue led to an impromptu vocabulary lesson between the native speaker and the non-native speaker, causing focus on form and noticing. Nevertheless, Bell concludes that her results suggest correlations between language play and proficiency rather than acquisition.

Studies conducted on adult English language learners have also revealed connections between language play and attention to form. Lucas (2003) argues that the interactional and creative nature of language play increases comprehension by encouraging learner-generated attention. Lucas analyzed the potential benefit of puns upon language learners by asking her participants, five pairs of advanced language learners of various language backgrounds, to read eight different comic strips, each of which contained a pun that had been categorized as either lexical, phonological, morphological, or syntactical. Their task was to deduce the meaning of the pun and either collaboratively explain it to the researcher or, if only one participant understood the meaning, to each other. These sessions were both audio and video recorded and were later transcribed and coded for language-related episodes; follow-up interviews were conducted the next day to assess the participants' retention. In almost all cases learners were able to spontaneously attend to the linguistic feature that caused the pun during the initial session. Lexical puns prompted the participants to use metalanguage to define the two potential meanings of a vocabulary word. Phonological puns drew learners' attention to the distinctions between minimal pairs. Participants practiced manipulating and defining the meanings of prefixes when deducing the morphological puns, such as in one example in which a learner discovered that *input* could be inverted to create the phrasal verb *put in*. Finally, syntactical puns led participants to notice the double meanings of phrases and sentences. Lucas found that the learners' comprehension of the linguistic features increased steadily from the beginning to the end of each dialogue and further still the following day, as evinced by the interviews. Interestingly, only 77.5% of the learners claimed to have understood the puns by the end of the sessions on the first day, but 91.25% of the learners were able to explain all of the puns in the follow-up interviews, leading Lucas to conclude that learners need time to internalize the features that they attend to during language play.

Diverging from a focus on face-to-face communication, Warner (2004) studied the types of language play that occur in spontaneous synchronous computer-mediated communication and sought to determine the effect of this play upon adult second language acquisition. Warner conducted her semester-long study in two university-level German courses: one, a beginning-level course in its second semester; the other, an advanced conversation course. The researcher and the instructor jointly conducted four activity sessions in each course, in which learners adopted an anonymous pseudonym and participated in a MOO, an online medium used for synchronous conversation. Learners were given tasks for each online session, such as choosing a product to market in Germany, or collaboratively designing and describing a room. Prior to any of the sessions, the researcher administered a questionnaire to the participants to elicit basic demographic information and levels of computer literacy, and after each online activity, a debriefing session was held to discuss the experience in general and language production specifically. Warner discovered three categories of language play that emerged from the transcripts: play with the form, play with the content/concept, and play with the frame.   Play with the form, in which learners used rhymes, puns, repetition, or poetry, occurred in one instance when students rhymed words in order to compose a rap and in another when they contrasted two German words for *cushion*. Play with the content/concept, which includes role play and the creation of fictional worlds, occurred as a form of peer correction during one of the sessions when a participant anthropomorphized a vocabulary word by giving it a voice. Also, the advanced conversation class discovered how to use emotes, commends that they could type into the MOO to express imagined physical behavior, and taught this function to each other. Finally, play with the frame, in which learners intentionally manipulated the meaning of language, was evident when one participant misunderstood the comment *aren't you nice* as genuine rather than sarcastic and was subsequently corrected by her

interlocutor, who stepped out of the role play to explain the intended meaning. Although Warner concludes that language play in computer-mediated communication cannot be directly linked to acquisition, she suggests that ludic language play is a means of negotiating identity in a second language. Additionally, Warner proposes that play is a basic function of language and should receive further attention in the field of second language acquisition.

LANGUAGE PLAY AND FOCUS ON FORM

In my initial enquiry, I sought to determine whether language play has any effect upon second language acquisition in children and adult learners; the findings in these articles suggest that there is a possible link. Three potentialities appear to exist for the association of play and acquisition: the preponderance of focusing on form caused by play, the relationship between play and proficiency, and the elicitation of output that occurs during language play.

First, language play seems to encourage learners to independently focus on language forms through noticing, comparing forms within and between languages, and receiving feedback from interlocutors. Ellis defines "form-focused instruction" as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (p. 1-2). While most of the interactions recorded in the studies reviewed were far from instructional, many did indeed cause learners to contemplate linguistic forms. If perchance a contemplated form has not yet been acquired by the speaker, the language play episode could in turn lead to noticing, either through enhancing the salience of the form in question or through a heightening of the affective climate.

In many of the studies reviewed, linguistic features are made more salient as result of language play. The participants in Lucas's (2005) study were required to recognize the double

meaning of each pun by unearthing the humor. Participants' attention was overtly drawn to the salient feature and often led to a moment of understanding, distinguishable by vocal exclamations, as evinced in one example when one learner explains to the other the double meaning of the word *position*:

19	**Hyun Ja**	He got promotion… he got new … *hand makes*
		upward movement… uh, position… more higher in his company.
20	**Carolina**	OH-H-H. Yes. You're right. (p. 227)

In the excerpt above, Carolina's comprehension is evident by the exclamation "OH-H-H" and her acknowledgement of her partner's correctness. Thus, humor served as a device to highlight lexical ambiguity. A similar scene occurs between the children in Bongartz and Schneider's (2003) study while they are singing a Capri Sun jingle:

P	… *weit weg von allen thi:ng, oder?*	far away from everything, or?
M	… *weit weg von allen Fans*…	far away from the fans
P	… *weit weg van allen Fans*…	far away from the fans (p. 25)

In this excerpt, the younger child initially substitutes the word *thing* for the word he doesn't know; however, after hearing his older brother sing the same jingle with the correct word, he repeats the verse, fixing his error.   Unlike the double meaning that is intentionally concealed in the puns in Lucus's (2005) study, the enhanced salience of the word *fans* in Bongartz and Schneider's study is spontaneous and oral. The younger child's attention was drawn to the vocabulary word simply because he noticed its lack in his rendition of the Capri Sun jingle, essentially generating his own gap-fill activity through playful singing. One notable difference between the studies is metalinguistic awareness of the adult learner; however, both the children and adults, whether consciously or not, spontaneously attended to linguistic features. Bongartz and Schneider suggest

that "focusing on form or meaning on one's own, by *self-initiative*, prime an individual for language-learning within a limited window of time, 'the learnable moment'" (p. 25). Hence, it can be hypothesized that the language learners in Lucas's (2005) and Bongartz and Schneider's (2003) studies had a strong probability of acquiring the lexical items that they encountered because of their self-initiative, inspired at least in part by play with language.

Broner and Tarone (2001) note, "the emotional excitement that comes with language play may simply make the L2 discourse more noticeable, and thus more memorable." This excitement is evident throughout the studies reviewed, as when Bell (2005) adds the parenthetical comment that her advanced-proficiency participant's laughter caused "a good portion of the tape" to be inaudible (p. 209) and in the numerous instances of laughter and changes in voice quality and pitch engaged in by the children in Aronsson and Cekaite's (2005) and Peck's (1980) studies. Even through computer-mediated communication, the participants in Warner's (2004) study are able to express their amusement with onomatopoeia, such as "hahahaha!" (p. 75). In his "noticing hypothesis," Richard W. Schmidt proposes that the opportunity for input to become intake arises when the learner consciously notices a particular form. Thus, the "affectively changed" (Broner & Tarone, 2001, p. 375) language play episodes throughout the studies reviewed may provide opportunities for language forms to move from input to intake, essentially allowing acquisition to occur.

Participants in the reviewed studies also focused on language forms through playful comparison between their L1 and L2 or between forms within the L2. Belz (2002) discovered that the learners in her study were resourceful in the code-switching they employed in their multilingual essays, carefully selecting from which language to borrow a morpheme or syntactic structure. Similarly, the children in Bongartz and Schneider's study (2003) freely blended English

and German to create words that suited their purposes. In one instance, the older child combined the English affix *super-* with the German affixes *ge-* and *–end* to invent the word *supergefrischene*, which can be translated to *super refreshing*. Although it cannot be ascertained if the child selected the morphemes for effect or because he lacked the German word for *super*, it can be presumed that his attention was drawn to the morphemes he chose, especially since he afterwards justified his choice of the word *super* to his younger brother (p. 20). It can be argued that through the process of blending words and morphemes from their L1 and L2, learners realized the potential of each form in each language, consciously comparing them to choose the one that matched their purposes.

Tarone (2000) argues that the creative usage of language may destabilize the interlanguage of a second language learner through restructuring, allowing further development. Broner and Tarone (2001) note that when learners violate the rules of both the L1 and the L2, they stretch the boundaries of the interlanguage, which may lead to growth of the linguistic system. By this logic, both Bongartz and Schneider's and Belz's studies might show destabilization of the interlanguage and thus evidence of acquisition. However, at this point we can only tentatively propose this notion; it is just as likely that the learners in Belz's study had already fully acquired the forms they wrote, as Belz suggests, and were simply experimenting with native-like proficiency. The older child in Bongartz and Schneider's study may also have been playing with forms he had already acquired; however, it is not clear from the interaction whether the younger child, his interlocutor, was aware of the forms, suggesting that language play may at least benefit the listener, even if not necessarily the speaker.

Additionally, learners often compared forms within the L2 during language play. The children in Aronsson and Cekaite's (2005) study participated in comparison between L2 forms, particularly highlighting semantic distinctions in their intentional mislabeling and their verbal play

with homonyms and homophones, such as during a song when one child playfully confuses the Swedish homonyms *kissar* (Swedish: *kittens*) and *kissar* (Swedish: *peeing*). The adults participating in the MOO in Warner's (2004) study also made comparisons between L2 forms when choosing the German word for *cushion* in order to create a witty name for a hypothetical product to market in Germany (p. 75). Although the adults' use of humor was intentional and goal-oriented while the children's use of humor was incidental, both instances caused attention to lexical form. Bell (2005) suggests that language play is "especially conductive to the acquisition of vocabulary" in that humor is often dependant upon the usage or understanding of vocabulary words, allowing learners to "adjust the parameters of each lexical item's semantic field" (p. 213). It is therefore noteworthy that the children in Aronsson and Cekaite's study are naturally only able to join e in their classmate's laughter when they understand the Swedish homonyms and, similarly, that the adults in Warner's study must appreciate the distinction between the German synonyms for *cushion* in order to choose the one that would create a humorous effect.

Additionally, focus on form occurred through the receipt of corrective feedback from interlocutors, generally in form of explanations in the interactions involving adults and through mocking and teasing in the interactions involving children. Bell (2005) found that focus on form occurred in spoken language play when learners attempted to use language humorously and were corrected or attempted to understand an interlocutor's use of humor. This often caused a shift in the conversation, during which the native speaker explained the miscommunication and provided a "mini vocabulary lesson" (p. 210). Although less spontaneous in nature, the participants in Lucas's (2005) study also provided correction in the form of explanation to each other in nine of the pun-related dialogues, in which one participant was obligated to clarify the pun to the other.

Lucas notes that this "[obliges the learners] to produce language to express their understanding" (p. 236).

Dissimilarly, the children in Aronsson and Cekaite's (2005), Broner and Tarone's (2001), and Peck's (1980) studies provided peer feedback by either mocking each other's errors or providing impatient repair. In most cases, the feedback was followed by one of three responses: repair by either the child who was corrected or other children involved in the interaction, a shift from one child mocking another's error to many children mocking the language form itself, or the corrected child's defense of their linguistic rights, as in an example provided by Broner and Tarone (2001) in which a child who receives peer correction replies "I can say whatever I want to" (p. 371). One of the children in Peck's (1980) study, in reaction to his native English-speaking peer's mocking, actually rephrases a sentence four times before producing a grammatically correct utterance. Peck acknowledges that ridicule may lead to frustration, but proposes that "intense feelings," whether positive or negative, "may contribute to the acquisition of a second language" (p. 162).

Through noticing, comparing forms between and within languages, and giving and receiving feedback, the learners in the studies reviewed frequently gave self-generated attention to a linguistic feature. In her study of unprompted language-related episodes, Williams (2001) suggests that spontaneous focus on form leads to greater retention of that form. Loewen (2005) supports this assertion in his study of incidental focus on form, finding that a significant percentage of learners retain forms introduced incidentally weeks after the form-focused episode; he proposes that incidental focus on form leads to uptake. Thereby, we might conclude that language play for the participants in the reviewed studies led to spontaneous focus on form, which then created the environment for more rapid acquisition by presenting opportunities for input to become uptake.

LANGUAGE PLAY AND PROFICIENCY

Second, the reviewed studies indicate a correlation between language play and proficiency, and thus multicompetence. Vivian Cook (1992) defines the multicompetent language user as one who knows more than one language such that they "might 'think' differently from those who know only one" (p. 563). Bell (2005) concluded that learners with higher proficiencies experimented with more complicated types of language play in their discourse with native speakers. Similarly, Belz (2005) found that the witty word and sentence-level play her participants engaged in reflected their levels of proficiencies in the languages in which they chose to write. Developing multicompetence was similarly evident in Broner and Tarone's (2001) study in that the children created fictional worlds during which they employed both their L1s and L2s in varying registers. As with the adults in both Belz's and Bell's study, the children may have been, as Broner and Tarone suggest, "[mastering] more than one register," or they may have been employing previously-acquired language and thus displaying their proficiency (p. 375). Belz argues that "form-based adult learner language play may represent the emergence of multicompetence in the learner" (p. 21). Certainly, form-based play is also indicative of multicompetence in children language learners. It can then be presumed that language play can be used as an evaluative tool for pedagogical purposes, for both the language learner and the instructor.

Subsequently, by demonstrating their multicompetence, language learners can negotiate and establish their identity in the target language. Belz (2002) suggests that language play might reveal "the learner's subjective sense of person and his or her relations to the world" (p. 21). One of her participants substantiates this in his multilingual essay when he writes, "My name is Carl, Charles [English], Carlo [Italian], карл [Russian], Kaaaaaaaarl [German]; the man who cannot

choose which language he wants to speak" (p. 26). This language learner both acknowledges and demonstrates his multicompetent identity; naming himself in each language that he speaks not only establishes him as a user of each language, but also, by this very process, exemplifies his ability to use his linguistic knowledge playfully. Additionally, Norton Peirce (1995), following Heller (1987), argues that "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self… and gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak" (p. 13). In Bell's (2005) study, this is evident in several of the dialogues between language learners and target language speakers. In one instance, a language learner of low advanced proficiency attempts to enter a conversation between a group of target language speakers by teasing one of the interlocutors about his attraction to animated characters, essentially trying to penetrate a social network through humor. Similarly, the youngest child in Bongartz and Schneider's (2003) study joins a enthusiastic dialogue between his older brother and a target language speaker by contributing insults about Barbie dolls, a category of talk that Bongartz and Schneider, following Cook (1997), include in their definition of language play. Hence, language play can be used to establish identity by giving language learners opportunities to become part of social networks in the target language.

LANGUAGE PLAY AND OUTPUT

Conceivably, language learners, whether consciously or not, are evincing their proficiency through playing with language; however, Aronsson and Cekaite (2005) propose another possibility: citing Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, they suggest that the linguistic forms that the children they studied play with are not previously mastered but are instead instances of "pushed output," which Swain (1985) argues is necessary for production of L2 linguistic forms. Episodes

of "extended language play and repair work" evince their suggestion (p. 188). In one particular interaction during which the children are playing the game Memory, one child declines to name the memory card that she has selected until the other children first banter about the appropriate language forms; possibly, the child's ultimate pronouncement of the picture on the card could be interpreted as pushed output caused by language play. Certainly as well, the aforementioned incident in Peck's (1982) study in which one child rephrases an utterance four times in order to produce the correctly structured sentence *you are crazy* is also an example of pushed output during language play. Were it not for his interlocutor's laughter and teasing ('a crazy what, a crazy daisy?') the correct syntax might not have been forced (p. 161). Interestingly, no episodes of extending repair work of adult learners are present in the studies reviewed; if not an artifact of the studies, this suggests perhaps that adults are either more cautious about making mistakes or less likely to repeat themselves in order to produce a correct sentence. In a few instances, an adult learner uses metalangauge to enquire about an error rather then trying to deduce the correct utterances through rephrasing (Bell, 2005, p. 209-210; Lucas, 2005, p. 230-231).

Swain's (2000) output hypothesis is supported further in that language play heightens the affective climate, which possibly impels the language learner to produce utterances beyond their level of comfort. Peck (1982) recognized the importance of output in the dialogues between the children in her study, noting that "some of the output suggests that the child acquirer is under a great deal of pressure" (p. 162). This is especially evident in the play sequences that Peck categorizes as "competitive," during which the child language learner does not get to fully express himself until the end of a lengthy dialogue (p. 157). Often, child language learners in the studies reviewed seem to be grasping at the conversation in an attempt to be an equal interlocutor, as in the

following dialogue between Peter, a native German speaker, and Martin, a German language

learner:

Pet	*Die Piraten kommen ins Wasser, okay?*	The pirates are going into the water, OK?
M	*Okay, mein Piraten -*	OK, my pirates -
Pet	*Auf die Insel, auf eine Insel*	On the island, on the island!
M	*Eine Insel!*	An island!
Pet	*Martin, auf die Insel d'rauf stehen, okay?*	Martin, they'll stay on the island, OK?
M	*Mein, mein -*	My, my -
Pet	*Die Piraten leben jetzt zusammen, okay?*	The pirates live together now, okay?
M	*Nein, mein geht, mein ist noch in Wasser, mein will Gold finden.*	No, mine go, mine are still in the water, mine want to find gold.

(Bongartz and Schneider, 2003, p. 21)

In the exchange above, Martin's first three comments are simple repetitions and repeated

utterances; nevertheless, he persists in contributing to the imaginative storyline until he eventually

asserts himself in his fourth turn. Ellis (1990) proposes that "production will aid acquisition only

when the learner is pushed" (p. 118). Thus, it can be surmised that the pressure presumably felt by

the children language learners in Peck's and Bongartz and Schneider's studies may have promoted

acquisition of the forms in question. Additionally, the task presented to the participants in Belz's

(2005) study, namely to creatively employ their L1 and L2 to compose a multilingual essay, might

have encouraged learners to attempt output above their current level of proficiency. Naturally, the

pressure that they may plausibly have felt would be unlike that of a face-to-face conversation;

however, the circumstance of having to produce a multilingual essay for an "experimental

assignment" could have potentially placed the participants under pressure to demonstrate their

linguistic capabilities (p. 21). The supposition that interactions seemingly demonstrating

proficiency are actually examples of pushed output illuminates a further potential contribution of language play to acquisition.

CONCLUSION

The studies reviewed above suggest a potential link between language play and second language acquisition for both children and adult learners. The results indicate that play promotes focus on form through noticing, comparison of forms within and between languages, and corrective feedback from interlocutors; furthermore, language play appears to be indicative of learner proficiency and multicompetence. However, instances of emerging multicompetence may also be interpreted as examples of pushed output (Swain 2000), which is theorized to be a necessary component for accurate L2 production. These findings may have pedagogical import for ESL teachers; employing language play in the classroom may provide insight into learners' multicompetencies, may encourage pushed output, and may as well be a viable tool for encouraging focus on form and noticing, the latter of which potentially presents the opportunity for input to become intake. Further research is needed in the area of language play to assess its efficacy as a pedagogical technique and to determine with certainty its implications in the field of second language acquisition.

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