



Learning EFL Formulaically through Authentic Children's Picture Books: Implications for Implicit Learning

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Abstract

Children are naturally predisposed to learn formulaically (Wray 2008), picking up frequently used multi-word strings and slowly learning to manipulate them according to contexts. The acquisition of language in chunks is part of implicit learning, which children benefit from more than adults, when it comes to acquiring a second or foreign language. However, this is a slow process, requiring substantial exposure to authentic language, something which is lacking in most classroom-bound EFL learning situations (Muñoz 2006). So how to help young learners “make use of implicit learning mechanisms” in the EFL classroom, thus tapping into their natural language learning resources? Research on language acquisition states the need to increase exposure to contextualised instances of language use and especially “input based around formulaic language” (Wray 2008), but how to achieve this in the context of instructed EFL teaching? In this paper, I argue that one way forward is represented by the consistent use of modern children's classics in picture book format, for they constitute a precious source of contextualised and formulaic language in use (as will be explained by means of various examples). In addition to this, their repetitive structures, and the fact that they lend themselves to multiple retellings, significantly increase exposure to contextualised vocabulary and multi-word strings, thus allowing children to make use of imitative and rote learning strategies that are known to be most conducive to language learning (Ding 2007; Snow 1983). For these and other reasons that will be explained in this paper, I argue that picture books can represent a most effective way of increasing exposure to natural language, which has the power to linger in children's mind and help them in their path towards implicit, and somehow independent, learning.

Keywords: *Formulaic language in EFL, storytelling, implicit learning.*

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