Trying to Make It Real: Harnassing Foreign Language Teaching to Children's Folklore, Formulaic Language and Rhythm

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Abstract

This paper aims to encourage future cross-disciplinary studies that bring together research in children's folklore, formulaic language, and foreign language teaching. The introduction provides a working definition of children's folklore. Section 2 then examines a necessarily limited set of examples of formulaic children's folklore, including seeking games, clever comebacks, handclapping games, parodies, and counting-out rhymes. Each analysis emphasizes the role of rhythm and formulaic chunks, and indicates the potential for cross-cultural studies or applications to foreign language teaching. Part Three focuses on the role of rhythm in the formulaicity of children's folklore, suggesting that rhythm aids fluency and the memorization of children's folklore, thereby enabling its recall and replication leading to further propagation. It is also suggested that research discussed by Patel (2008), which concludes that speech is not isochronous, may be neglecting to take into account the frequency of formulaic language in speech. Finally, assuming that communication in the real world is the ultimate objective, the author calls for greater use of authentic, peer-sourced and peer-targeted material in foreign language teaching at the primary school level.

Résumé

Cet article vise à encourager des études transdisciplinaires qui réunissent des recherches menées dans les domaines du folklore enfantin, des séquences pré-fabriquées, et de la didactique des langues étrangères. L'introduction fournit d'abord une définition opérationnelle du folklore enfantin. La deuxième partie examine un échantillon nécessairement limité d'exemples de folklore enfantin de nature plus ou moins pré-fabriquée (*formulaic*) dont les jeux de poursuite, les répliques, les jeux pour taper dans les mains (« tape-mains »), les parodies et les formulettes d'élimination (comptines au sens strict). L'analyse de chaque exemple met en avant le rôle du rythme et des séquences pré-fabriquées, et indique le potentiel pour des études transculturelles ou des applications sur le plan de la didactique des langues. La troisième partie met l'accent sur le rôle du rythme dans la nature formulaïque du folklore enfantin et suggère que le rythme soutient la fluidité ainsi que la mémorisation de ces éléments, facilitant ainsi le rappel et la réplication menant à une propagation plus forte. Il est également soutenu que des recherches qui affirment que la parole n'est pas isochrone, comme celles discutées par Patel (2008), ne prennent pas suffisamment en compte la fréquence des séquences pré-fabriquées dans la langue parlée. Enfin, en s'appuyant sur l'hypothèse que la

communication dans le monde réel est l'objectif ultime, l'auteur plaide pour l'utilisation des matériaux plus authentiques pour l'enseignement des langues à l'école primaire, matériaux qui proviennent notamment de la culture enfantine entre pairs, qui ciblent les enfants eux-mêmes.

Keywords: children's folklore, children's play, children's rhymes, counting-out rhymes, formulaic language, foreign language teaching, handclapping games, Hide and Seek, isochrony, parody, oral tradition, rhythm, seeking games

Mots clés : cache-cache, comptines, didactique des langues, folklore enfantin, formulettes enfantines, isochronie, jeu enfantin, parodie, rythme, séquences pré-fabriquées, tape-mains, tradition orale.

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1. Introduction

The connections between formulaic language and oral traditions have often been underlined, for example in reference to the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord on formulas in oral epic songs (Lord 1960) or in relation to the study of blues lyrics (Taft 2006). Wray (2008, p. 38) has noted that people in literate cultures can draw on their own experience as children using playground rhymes to more fully understand oral cultures. This article has several interrelated aims that relate to this comment. First, the examples presented below in section 2 are provided to suggest that a vast amount of material within children's oral tradition is directly relevant to the study of formulaic language and that for the most part this has not yet been explored in depth. Secondly, the necessarily brief analysis of these selected examples stress the role of rhythm in reinforcing the memorability of formulas used by children in their play. As will be seen, these play sequences are often anchored to basic binary rhythmic patterns that allow players to synchronize bodily movement. In section 3 I discuss the powerful mutually reinforcing partnership between rhythm and formulaicity, and also spell out some consequences for the ongoing debate on the isochony of speech (Patel 2008). I also propose that rhythm be added to the list of diagnostic criteria for formulaicity drawn up by Wray (2008, p. 116-121). Finally, as a teacher and researcher working in a department and a research team that is deeply involved in foreign language teaching, I aim to link the study of formulaic language in children's folklore to practical teaching concerns. The discussion in Sections 2 and 3 therefore sets the stage for Section 4, which sketches out some proposals for using children's formulaic verbal folklore and vernacular speech to develop a more inclusive foreign language syllabus in the primary school that reflects more accurately the target culture and language. This paper addresses a diverse readership: formulaic language specialists who might be interested in investigating children's folklore as well as researchers who already study children's folklore (folklorists, ethnolinguists, sociologists, psychologists, play workers and so on) and language learning/teaching specialists. The conclusion will broach future cross-disciplinary perspectives.

2. Formulaic Language in Children's Folklore

2.1. Children's folklore: a working definition

The following working definition of children's folklore will give the reader some idea of what is meant by this concept:

Children's folklore, or childlore, may be regarded as the traditional playful speech, behaviour, objects and mental representations (such as superstitions or game rules) that are exchanged by word of mouth among children in their peer groups, especially on the school playground, but also at home, on the street, in summer camp, on the school bus and in other places where children gather informally without close adult supervision. Among the many genres studied under the heading of children's folklore are play rhymes, satirical rhymes, singing games, secret languages, puns, riddles, tongue twisters, taunts, nicknames, parodies, jokes, stories, games, pranks, beliefs, calendar customs and material folklore. The flavour, functions and mode of oral transmission of children's folklore are quite different from *nursery lore*, the adult folklore that aims to educate and entertain the young child [...], although there is some overlap between the two categories, as when children parody nursery rhymes. (Arleo 2004, p. 286)

It is clear from this definition that children's folklore embraces many non-verbal elements that may be less relevant to the study of formulaic language, although it will be suggested that

there are analogies between stereotyped motor sequences in children's play and verbal formulas.

2.2 Examples of formulaic children's folklore

The following examples, only the tip of a huge iceberg, are intended to illustrate the range of uses of formulaic language in several genres of children's folklore. I use the term "formulas" or occasionally the expression "formulaic sequence" for longer segments. While it is not certain that all these items are Morpheme Equivalent Units, as defined by Wray (2008, p. 12), many of them do meet at least some of the eleven diagnostic criteria that she proposes for assessing intuitive judgements about formulaicity (ibid., 116-121). In the following discussion the abbreviation "DC" is used to refer to these criteria. As will be seen below, children's folklore is often formulaic, but not necessarily in the same way as in other oral-traditional genres such as folk ballads or epic poetry. On the playground speed is at a premium. As a result, play routines incorporate peer-transmitted set phrases learned holistically and usually not broken down into smaller components. This conforms to the Needs Only Analysis proposed by Wray (2002, p. 130 and 2008, p. 17), according to which children do not break down linguistic material unless there is a specific reason to do so.

2.2.1 "Ready or not, here I come": formulas used in seeking games

Children's games are generally rule-governed and ritualistic, requiring traditional formulas at particular stages of play sequences. For example, in seeking gamess such as "Hide 'n' Seek," the seeker shouts out a four-beat warning to the hiders: "Ready or not, here I come." This well-known variant is the one that I learned and used as a child growing up in New Jersey (United States) around 1960, but is known in different parts of the English-speaking world. Figure 1 below uses a simplified metrical grid to display this formula as a (relatively) isochronous sequence. The X's in the grid represent beats are considered as points in time without duration; the intervals between X's are called *time-spans*; and a series of X's is a *grid row*. The beat is a mental event, correlated with temporal patterning in the brain, which allows performers to synchronize bodily movements (e.g., hand-claps) or phonetic gestures (e.g., syllable onsets). Like Hayes and MacEachern (1998: 476), I assume that "for the study of sung or chanted verse […] all grid rows are performed isochronously, or more precisely, isochronously in theory; that is, abstracting away from various structural and expressive timing adjustments." For the purposes of this paper, only two grid rows are shown. The reader may think of the lower grid row as the eighth-note level and the higher row as the quarter-note level, which corresponds here the basic perceptually salient level sometimes described by the Renaissance term *tactus* (Lerdahl & Jackendoff 1983: 71).

x			x			x		x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rea-	dy	or	not,			here		I	come

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Fig. 1: Metrical grid for formula used in hide 'n' seek.

This sequence might be considered as a formula of formulas, since it contains two two-beat formulaic segments: "Ready or not" and "here I come," both used extensively in other contexts. "Ready or not" might by analysed as an elliptical form of "Whether you're ready or not, X," where X stands for an imminent and inevitable event predicted by the speaker (e.g. "we're leaving in five minutes"). The full underlying sequence accepts other subjects (personal pronouns or names), e.g., "Whether she's/Steve's ready or not, X." "Here I come" is another widespread formula in everyday speech and it too accepts other subjects. Compared to the plausible paraphrase "I am coming now," there is indeed "something grammatically unusual" (Wray 2008, p. 116, DC A) about the word string "Here I come," both in the use of the simple present and the position of the spatial deictic "here," which is preposed before the subject.[1] Semantically, "here" might be viewed as a spatial metaphor for the time deictic "now," in accordance with a widespread and perhaps universal mapping in which time is conceptualized as space (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). But the phrase may also retain a spatial meaning, especially in the context of play, since it indicates the location of the speaker (i.e., "I am coming towards you from here"). The play formula shown in Figure 1 is however more than the sum of its parts and for most native speakers it is readily and primarily associated with children's seeking games, that is "a specific situation" (Wray, ibid., p. 117, DC C). It is interesting that the expression has been extended metaphorically in popular culture, for example in the song "Ready or not, here I come," released by The Delphonics in 1968, and later covered by the Jackson Five and The Fugees.[2] The transfer to popular song is no doubt facilitated by the binary rhythm of the formula, comprising two two-beat segments, which is extremely widespread in English oral poetry, from *Beowulf* to rap, and which may indeed be universal (Arleo 2006).

Play formulas like "Ready or not here I come" are probably heard and used hundreds of times during childhood. Since they have a regulatory function in basic and possibly universal hiding or chasing games, they tend to endure over time and space, with much local variation. Iona and Peter Opie (1969, pp. 149-153) offer the following more elaborate dialectal variant:

Ex. 1: Here I come, ready or not,
         If ye're spied it's no my fau't. (Perth and Falkirk)

They also give examples of rhymes used by the hiders to alert each other that the seeker is near:

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[1] I wish to thank my colleague Mark Tutton for his insights regarding "Here I come," which have allowed me to expand my original interpretation.

[2] In their 1966 soul classic "Getting Ready", The Temptations sang the line "getting ready here I come." More recently Bob Dylan recycles this formula in the song "Po' Boy" on his 2001 *Love and Theft* album: "Man says 'Freddy!' I say 'Freddy who?' He says 'Freddy or not, here I come.'"

Ex. 2   Keep in, keep in, wherever you are,
          The cat's a-coming to find you. (Birmingham)

As shown in this example, seeking games often represent symbolically the predator-prey relationship, and might be plausibly compared to warning calls used in the animal world to signal a predator. As the Opies point out (ibid. p. 149), in seeking games the players are out of sight and most of the time and uncertain of what is happening, but within hailing distance. Another aspect of these formulas is that they are linked to immediate action (DC F). A seeker who did not follow up on her promise ("here I come") would be violating the rules of the game. Likewise, it would not be fair to start physically seeking the hiders before the speech act is actually completed by uttering "come" of the last beat of the sequence. These seeking formulas provide an invaluable opportunity for cross-cultural study.

2.2.2 "It takes one to know one": clever comebacks

In their classic study, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Iona and Peter Opie included a chapter entitled "Wit and Repartee," which contains many examples of formulaic utterances that must be executed rapidly in order to function successfully in the child's peer group. They note "that schoolchildren, constantly fending for themselves amongst their fellows, acquire an armoury of ready responses, and a lack of inhibition about using them" (Opie & Opie, 1959, p. 61). In this category are "clever comebacks," to use a term coined by Mary and Herbert Knapp (1976). For example, in reply to an insult, the two-beat formula "It takes one to know one," allows a child to immediately ward off verbal attacks and save face. As can be seen in the metrical grid below, the stressed verbs "take" and "know," both containing diphthongs, are synchronized with the beat, emphasizing the grammatical parallelism and contributing to the memorability of the formula.

	x			x	
x	x	x	x	x	x
It	takes	one	to	know	one

Fig. 2: Metrical grid for a clever comeback

Like the formulas in seeking games, this is an area that invites comparative study. For example, the French equivalent "*Celui qu'y dit, y est*" (a contraction of "celui qui le dit, l'est", she/he who says it/so, is it/so") is also a two-beat formula, with stress falling on the verbs, as in English. It also uses the same "people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones" logic. As often in oral tradition, one finds a number of variants, such as example 3 below, which I collected from a six-year old girl in Saint-Nazaire, France in 1980:

Ex. 3: C'est toi qui l'as dit en premier, c'est toi qui l'est.

          (You're the one who said it first, (so) you are one)

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Comebacks can be more elaborate, as can be seen in the following example, collected from a nine-year old girl in Saint-Nazaire in 1982:

Ex. 4: Child A: Ta gueule ! ("Shut up")

Child B: J'ai pas une gueule, j'ai une bouche qui t'embête, qui t'envoie un paquet de merde par la poste.

(I don't have an "animal face," I have a mouth that bothers you   and   sends   you   a package of shit by mail.)

Such sequences, although they may appear "inventive" to the adult observer, are rarely novel, but have usually been encountered previously in communication from other children and are usually passed down from one generation of schoolchildren to the next (see Wray ibid., p. 120, DC H). Knapp & Knapp (1976, p. 58) point out that jeers, although they "may sound like the prelude to a fight," do not necessarily express animosity and may even be "shouted by good friends who have established a jeering partnership."[3] The pragmatic maxim at work here is not "be original" but "use the appropriate community-approved formula and be fast." Timing, speech rhythm, intonation and paralinguistic features all contribute to the success of the speech act. To be effective these comebacks must be proceduralized, they must get there "just in time." Bottom-up assembly simply takes too long and one risks losing face. In their rapid proceduralized deployment they might be compared to routine politeness formulas, which in adult speech may be used ironically as clever comebacks, e.g. "Well, THANK YOU!"

2.2.3 Handclapping games

Handclapping games are yet another genre requiring fast real-time processing so that players may synchronize their movements to a regular beat. In his recent book *The Lore of the Playground*, an update of the Opies' work, folklorist Steve Roud reports that most little girls (in Britain) start their clapping career with *A Sailor Went to Sea:*

Ex. 5: A sailor went to sea, sea, sea
To see what he could see, see, see
But all that he could see, see, see
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea. (Roud 2010: 298-99)

Roud cites many variations in which the slot "A sailor went to X" is replaced by words which are mimed, such as "A sailor went to eye, eye, eye/To see what he could eye, eye, eye" with players touching their eyes. The entire verse may be seen as a formulaic sequence with paradigmatic variation, as is often the case in children's rhymes. Within this long sequence,

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[3] Jeering in children's folklore recalls adolescent and adult verbal dueling, such as "The Dozens" in the African American tradition, which has been a major influence on rap. Although often more inventive than in children's cultures, due to great cognitive and cultural development, this form of oral poetry remains highly formulaic.

we also note the traditional formula "at the bottom of the deep blue sea," which appears immune to variation.

Learning to perform handclapping rhymes fluently requires lots of rehearsal, in order to coordinate text, music and movement. Australian ethnomusicologist Kathryn Marsh, who has carried out extensive field work in Australia, Norway, Korea, the UK and the US, has observed that kids do not break down their games, but learn them holistically. Studying one group of girls she noted that there seemed to be "a symbiotic relationship between movement, music, and text that would indicate that separating these elements into disjunct segments would hinder learning rather than assist it." (Marsh, 2008, p. 143). This suggests that Needs Only Analysis applies not only to language but to music and movement as well. The comparison of studies of handclapping games shows that basic stereotyped clapping cycles are found cross-culturally (Hubbard 1982, Arleo 1997 & 2001, Gaunt 2006, Marsh 2008, Chauvin-Payan 2010). Handclapping melodies may recycle melodic fragments or clichés available in the culture. For instance, the widespread handclapping game known in English as "When Susie was a baby" exists in French as "*Quand Delphine/Fanny/Sophie... était un bébé*". Although the narrative in the French versions is close to the English versions, the melody is different. The French melody starts exactly like the well-known Christmas carol "*Il est né le divin enfant*," a fact that is often overlooked by native speakers (Arleo 2001, p. 123).

A traditional French handclapping rhyme, "*Trois p'tits chats*," illustrates the use of formulaic chunks under precise metrical conditions.[4] Example 6 and the accompanying metrical grid (Fig. 3) shows one of the shorter versions.[5]

Ex. 6: Trois p'tits chats, trois p'tits chats, trois p'tits chats, chats, chats,
Chapeau d' paille, chapeau d' paille, chapeau d'paill', paill' paill'
Paillasson...
Somnambule...
Bulletin...
Tintamarre
Marabout
Bout d'ficell'
Selle de ch'val...
Ch'val de Troie
Trois p'tits chats.

(Three little cats/Straw hat/Doormat/Sleepwalker/Bulletin/Hullabaloo/Witch doctor/Piece of string/Horse saddle/Trojan horse/Three little cats)

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[4] Milman Parry, cited by Lord (1960, p. 30), defined the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."

[5] The melody is indicated by using numerals to refer to scale degrees, e.g. in the key of C minor, the sequence "1 2 3b" would refer to "C D Eb." Arleo (1997) provides an indepth analysis of this handclapping game.

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x              x              x              x

x      x     x     x     x     x     x
Trois p'tits  chats,      trois p'tits chats,
1      2      3b          2     3b    1


x              x              x              x

x      x     x     x     x     x     x
Trois  p'tits chats       chats       chats,
3b     4      5           5           5


x              x              x              x

x      x     x     x     x     x     x     x
Cha-   peau d' pai-  lle,   cha-  peau d' pai-  lle
5      6b    5     4      4     5     4     3b


x              x              x              x

x      x     x     x     x     x     x     x
Cha-   peau d' paill'       paill'       paill' ...
3b     4      3b            2            1
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Fig. 3: Metrical grid for "Trois p'tits chats"

The text is based on a simple technique, sometimes called concatenation in treatises on rhetoric. Each line consists of a trisyllabic two-beat segment (e.g., "*Trois p'tits chats*," where the syllables in bold characters are aligned with the higher beat) that is expanded through repetition. The lines are linked by using the last syllable of one line to form the beginning of the next, creating a rather surrealistic collage. Many versions form a loop via the pun "*Troie/Trois*," so that the game may go on indefinitely until the players run out of steam. In addition to one-word segments (e.g., "*somnambule*"), there are many ready-made multi-word chunks, such as "*chapeau d'paille*," "*bout d'ficelle*," "*selle de ch'val*," and "*ch'val de Troie*." In another version we find the sequence "*Lait de vache/Vache de ferme/Ferme ta gueule/ Gueule de singe*" (Cow milk/farm cow/shut up/monkey face). Variants of this popular rhyme have been collected around the French-speaking world, including Belgium, Switzerland, Algeria, Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Canada (Arleo 1997, pp. 66-67). Some versions integrate local allusions, such as the sequence "*Fort de Tourneville/Ville du Havre/Havre-Eclair*," which all refer to Le Havre, and was used by the informant around 1930 in this city (Arleo, ibid., p. 65). This example raises the question of the formulaic nature of proper names, which often appear to be processed holistically. "Trois p'tits chats" is now known primarily as a clapping game used primarily by schoolgirls, but it is derived from a "*jeu de société*," a verbal game used by adults, attested in a slang dictionary published in 1889

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(Arleo, ibid., p. 34). I have collected some versions that were used in families as a reply to someone who said "*J'en ai marre*," a common formulaic phrase that might be rendered as "I'm sick and tired (of something)." The other speaker(s) would immediately chime in with "*Marabout/Bout d'ficelle*" and so on. From the point of view of language acquisition the game allows children to pick up words or formulas that sometimes involve cultural allusions ("*Ch'val de Troie*") or which may reflect local reality, as mentioned above. Of course, it cannot always be assumed that children fully understand the phrases sung in a play context, expecially when they are being used largely for the sake of sound within an incoherent collage that reminds one of the surrealists' *cadavres exquis*. The meaning of these signifiers is gradually fleshed out in the child's growing mental lexicon, and it is often the case that even adults do not always "get" dated cultural allusions.

2.2.4 Parodies: "*Frère Jacques*"

Children's folklore includes many parodies of songs and nursery rhymes, which tend to be formulaic by nature. The well-known round "*Frère Jacques*" provides some interesting examples of formulas set to a previously-known tune. In the original version, shown below, the third line "*Sonnez les matines*" is probably learned holistically and it is doubtful that many children or even adults understand this as a reference to a monk ringing the bells for the first morning prayer. According to David & Delrieu (1988) the original version was satirical, poking fun at a monk having a hard time getting out of bed.

Ex. 7: Frère Jacques, frère Jacques,
        Dormez-vous, dormez-vous ?
        Sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines,
        Din din don, din din don.

French schoolchildren learn several parodies of this song through oral peer tranmission. The following variants were all collected in or near Saint-Nazaire (France) in 1985. Examples 7a and 7b were sung by four girls aged 9 and 10, and accompanied by clapping. Example 7c was provided by a 16-year old girl, who had sung it as a child around the age of 7.

7a: Frère Jacques, Jacques Chirac-eu
      Où vas-tu , trou du cul ?
      Je vais à la messe draguer les gonzesses.
      Dinn, daing, dong, fais pas l'con.

      Frère Jacques, Jacque Chirac-eu
      Where are you going, asshole?
      I'm going to mass to pick up some chicks.
      Ding dang dong, don't be an idiot.
.

7b. Frère Jacques, fais pas l'Jacques,
      Dormez-vous, fais pas l'fou,
      Sonnez les matines, fais pas l'imbécile,
      Dinn, daing, dong, fais pas l'con.

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Frère Jacques, don't play the Jacques,
Are you sleeping? Don't be a fool.
Ring the morning bells, don't be an imbecile.
Ding dang dong, don't be an idiot.

7c.   Frère Jacques dans les tomates,
Dormez-vous dans les choux?
Sonnez les matines dans les aubergines
Dinn, daing, dong, dans les melons.

Frère Jacques in the tomato patch,
Are you sleeping among the cabbages?
Ring the morning bells in the aubergines (eggplant?)
Ding dang dong, among the melons.

Since "*Frère Jacques*" is a canon the tune is extremely stable with no musical variation. The variants shown above respect the text-setting constraints in wedding the new lyrics to this unique tune, with the exception of an epenthetic "*e muet*" added to Chirac (ex. 7a) to respect the four-beat rhythmic pattern. The popular transgressive Jacques Chirac parody contains several clearly formulaic expressions, such as "*Où vas-tu?*" and the well-known idiomatic phrase "*draguer les gonzesses*." The use of the more formal "*Où vas-tu?*" with subject-verb inversion, which is far less frequent in everyday speech than than "*Tu vas où?*," is no doubt for purposes of rhyme with the familiar insult "*trou du cul*" ("asshole"). These two-beat segments are sung on a rising melodic contour, which in the original version reflects the usual rising intonation for questions. Example 7b illustrates grammatical parallelism, where the slot within the frame < *fais pas ____* > is filled by nouns in the semantic field of stupidity. These expressions are clearly formulaic. Example 7c, whose more innocuous lyrics make it more appropriate and useful in a French as a foreign language classroom setting, shows paradigmatic variation in the prepositional phrase <*dans les* + fruit or vegetable>, but seems less formulaic.

2.2.5 Counting-out rhymes

This brief excursion into the formulaic nature of children's folklore ends with a look at the counting-out rhyme, a genre that is widespread across cultures and has been documented in at least fifty languages (Arleo 2009). Counting-out rhymes may be defined as "performative utterances used to designate a central player, usually through elimination, in games like *tag* (also known as *tig*) or *hide and seek*. When all the players except one are eliminated the counter in effect dubs the remaining player *It*" (ibid., p. 310). One of the most famous French counting-out rhymes, "*Am stram gram*," consists entirely of nonsense syllables. While this utterance lacks lexical and propositional meaning, it nevertheless has pragmatic meaning, i.e. the player who is designated when the counter says the last syllable of this sequence ("*gram*") is "out". "*Am stram gram*" is formulaic and probably learned holistically, although it is also

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found in children's books and is sometimes learned in the classroom. Any segmentation of this sequence can only be based on the identification of recurring sound patterns (as one might segment a piece of instrumental music) as there are no grammatical or semantic clues. Example 8 below, based on Arleo (2011, p. 98), displays this rhyme as an unsegmented string; syllables in bold type are aligned with the basic beat and correspond to the gestures of the counter.

Ex. 8: [**am**.**stram**.**gram**.**pi**.ke.**pi**.ke.**ko**.le.**gram**.**bu**.re.**bu**.re.**ra**.ta.**tam**.**am**.**stram**.**gram**]

The English-language equivalent of "*Am stram gram*" is no doubt "Eeny meeny miny mo," with its famous nonsense line that has shown remarkable stability over time due to its memorable sound patterns (Rubin 1995, Arleo 2011). The second line of Eeny Meeny shows paradigmatic variation with the frame "catch a X by the toe," where X is filled by a disyllabic noun usually referring to an animal (e.g. tiger, rooster, rabbit, black cat), an ethnic or social group (e.g., beatnik, or the racist term "nigger," often replaced by "tiger") or a perceived national enemy (e.g., Old Tojo, Castro, Viet Cong) (Abrahams & Rankin 1980). The entire "Eeny Meeny" rhyme might be considered as a formulaic sequence with a pragmatic function: appointing a central "It" figure for purposes of play. On the other hand, the rhyme can be segmented into smaller grammatical and semantic components In this sense it is not really a Morpheme Equivalent Unit.

Rubin (1995, p. 251), in his pioneering study of epic, ballads and counting-out rhymes from the perspective of cognitive psychology has claimed that "the genre of counting-out rhymes lacks formulas" and that "unless one stretches the definition of a formula, none seem to appear in the tradition." This assessment depends on a rather narrow definition of "formula," which Rubin understands in the context of oral-formulaic theory, and is probably overstated. There are no doubt few examples of the commonplace diction of traditional folk ballads (e.g., "blood-red wine") or epithets of epic poetry (e.g. "swift-footed Achilles." Nevertheless, counting-out rhymes and children's rhymes in general are the repositories of formulaic fragments from many sources, including folk ballads, popular songs, school lessons, and so on. In particular, counting-out rhymes are often extended by formulaic codas, which allow the counter to alter the outcome (Arleo 1980). As shown in the following example collected in Saint-Nazaire in 1985 from an 11-year old girl, if the counter is not happy with the initial choice of the player she can add:

Ex. 9: Mais si le roi et la reine d'Angleterre ne le veut (sic) pas, ce ne sera pas toi"

("But if the king and queen of England do not want it, it won't be you").

This widespread coda is a perfect illustration of the performative nature of counting-out rhymes, although it is somewhat ironic that children in the French Republic France appeal to the higher royal authority of England in order to designate "It" ("*Le loup*").

In English, the formula "Out goes he" is widespread, referring to the elimination of a player in the counting-out ritual, as shown in the following examples:

Ex. 10: One, two, three/Out goes he. (Bolton 1969 [1888], p. 112, n° 720)

Ex. 11: Monkey, monkey, barrel of beer,
How many monkeys are there here?
One, two, three, out goes he;
He's a monkey, don't you see? (ibid., n° 729)

3. Rhythm and formulaicity

3.1 A powerful partnership

The discussion above has stressed the role of rhythm in reinforcing the cohesion and memorability of formulaic chunks in children's folklore. Many other genres of children's folklore (e.g. skipping rhymes, ball-bouncing rhymes, singing games), which cannot be examined here, are also sung or chanted to a regular beat and accompanied by movement. As we have seen, the basic rhythmic building block of many children's rhymes or songs is the two-beat chunk, which is then integrated into larger and usually binary units (based on powers of two), the four-beat line, the eight-beat rhyming couplet, and the sixteen-beat stanza, which may be universal (Burling 1966, Arleo 2006, Dufter & Noel Aziz Hanna 2009). Other folkloric and highly formulaic genres, such as proverbs, are often performed to a relatively regular beat, e.g., "Spare the rod and spoil the child," where the stressed syllables are aligned with four basic beats. It appears that formulaicity and rhythm go hand in hand, one reinforcing the other. The question arises as to whether rhythm, or more precisely isochrony (i.e. the synchronization of syllables with a regular beat) should be added to the diagnostic criteria for formulaicity. In the commentary to DC F, Wray (2008, 119) does refer to song extracts, "where the tune strongly marks the words as being formulaic," but she does not propose a specific rhythmic criteria. While it is clear that formulaic language is not systematically isochronic, the presence of a perceived regular beat may well increase the likelihood that the segment is formulaic. When binary rhythmic patterns are combined with phonological features such as alliteration, as in the "Spare the rod, spoil the child," example above, the impression of formulaicity may well be augmented. This would make sense since rhythm aids both fluency and memorization, which contribute to the recall of a formulaic sequence and its subsequent replication and propagation.

3.2. How isochronous is speech?

The relationship between formulaicity and rhythm is also important because it casts light on the long-lasting debate concerning the degree of isochrony in language. In his discussion of rhythm in speech, based on a number of empirical studies, Patel (2008, p. 122) concludes that "speech is not isochronous." However, it is possible that the research Patel describes has underestimated the amount of formulaic language in speech by emphasizing (like Chomsky) the novelty of language. This is particularly evident in the following passage in which he attempts to explain "why periodicity has been (and continues to be) such an enduring concept in speech rhythm research" (ibid., p. 150):

"The third reason for periodicity's allure may be the belief that because various temporal patterns in human physiology (e.g., heartbeat, walking, chewing) exhibit periodic structure, speech is also likely to be periodic, perhaps even governed by rhythmic pattern generators. However, the use of rhythmic neural circuits for speech is not particularly plausible. The constant use of novel utterances in language means that articulators must be coordinated in different ways each time a new sentence is produced." (ibid., p.151)

The telltale phrase in this extract is "constant use of novel utterances in language," with the adjective *constant* in the role of the "smoking gun." Although Patel does not totally exclude old "non-novel" recycled utterances, he suggests that novelty rules in language use, thereby downplaying formulaicity. Considerable evidence from corpus linguistics, cited by Wray and others, indicates that this overemphasis of novelty may be a distortion of linguistic reality.

Given the relatively small number of studies on isochrony in speech, linked to a limited set of languages, dialects and social contexts, I believe that the jury is still out. As suggested elsewhere (Arleo 1995), there may be a continuum in language ranging from highly isochronic utterances, where formulaic language plays an important role, to rhythmically irregular and even dysfluent utterances, perhaps due to cognitive overload, as when one struggles to articulate a "new idea" or to speak in an unfamiliar language or register. A testable hypothesis would involve the following two components: a) formulaic speech is far more frequent than has been suggested in former "laboratory" studies and b) this results in a higher incidence of isochrony in speech. Such a hypothesis could be tested through field work using naturalistic data, or by devising experiments in which utterances containing formulaic sequences (e.g., fragments of proverbs, songs, quotes, children's rhymes, etc.) are compared with utterances without such sequences.

This discussion should be framed in a more general reflexion on the categorization of speech and song (or chant) in different cultures, and its implications for research. The examples of children's folklore that have been examined above are all pieces of language, and in that respect deserve to be studied within linguistics. As Patel (ibid., p. 154) states, "no comparison of rhythm in language and music is complete without a discussion of poetry and song." Within contemporary "Western" cultures, singing and chanting are often viewed as somehow being "outside" of so-called ordinary language, and the academic territory devoted to its study is usually considered the domain of a small set of researchers, including musicologists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists and specialists of oral poetry. Children's rhymes, popular song, rap and so on are of course specialized genres, but language is often used for specific purposes. The division between speech and song may be much more pronounced in the Western adult societies of the last few centuries than in cultures elsewhere or in other times. In a seminal study of genres lying between speech and song, List (1963, p. 3) pointed out that certain cultures "make a distinction between what is referred to as speech or talking and what is referred to as song or singing. Other cultures do not necessarily make this distinction. Other cultures distinguish forms other than speech or song which to us may seem to be intermediate forms." The Hopi Indians of northwestern Arizona, for example, distinguish between speech, song and announcing; for example, an announcement of a rabbit hunt uses a type of chant based on two unstable pitches about a fourth apart (ibid.). I suspect that these so-called intermediate genres often contain formulaic language, and that many are performed with some degree of isochrony. After all, many cultures are (or were) organised around daily collective activities and rituals that require synchronization of movement, such as work songs, dance, or religious chant. In such cultures novel self-expression may not be a priority. Rather, it might be more be useful to react quickly and appropriately in regularly recurring social situations, as we have seen above in the discussion of "clever comebacks." Combining formulaic language with basic rhythmic and phonological patterning that enhances memorization is an adaptive strategy in such an environment. Looking further back in time, Mithin (2006) has suggested plausibly that the Neanderthals used a form of holistic

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communication that combined features of what many present-day *homo sapiens* call language and music.[6]

The following section relates the above examples and discussion to some practical teaching concerns in teaching foreign languages to children.

4. Formulaic children's folklore for foreign language teaching in the primary school

Let me begin with three preliminary remarks. First, a more accurate but less felicitous title for this paper would have been "Trying to make it real most of the time." For many reasons, often practical, using semi-authentic or even non-authentic material may be useful in the classroom. Nevertheless, it can be argued that authentic language should be introduced as early and as often as possible because communication in the real world is the ultimate objective. Furthermore, being exposed to the language of peers in other cultures is likely to increase the child's motivation. Secondly, this discussion refers to a foreign-language context, specifically the teaching of English and occasionally other languages to French-speaking children in primary schools in France. The use of children's folklore in a second-language context, e.g. immigrant children learning English in an English-speaking country or French in a French-speaking country, offers a major advantage as children are getting direct input from their peers on the playground, and the teacher can then "play around" pedagogically with material that has already been learned, at least partially, through direct oral transmission. Finally, in discussing possible "pedagogical spinoffs" from children's folklore it is necessary to address ethical issues. As noted above in discussing parodies, children's folklore is often transgressive and some of the more "subversive" material is obviously not appropriate for the classroom.

The possibility of using children's folklore to teach foreign languages to children is a question that has interested me for some time (Arleo 2008). I teach a short introductory class on children's folklore with students as part of a third-year course on teaching English in the primary school. As a requirement for this class, the students conduct field-work related to children's folklore in English or French, and suggest possible pedagogical applications for French-speaking children learning English. In some cases this involves collecting material from native speakers or recording rhymes, songs and games from French children and looking for English-language equivalents. The students are asked to provide a short report with a brief but precise "ethnographic" description of the material collected as well as an audio recording or video, followed by a discussion of possible pedagogical applications in the EFL classroom. My interest in this approach was also reinforced by observing my collegue Dora François-Salsano using counting-out rhymes with young children as part of her doctoral work, which involved developing a language awareness program in a local nursery school (see François-Salsano 2009 and in this volume). The children were exposed to English, Italian, German, Portuguese and Spanish. One of her most striking findings, from my perspective, was that counting-out rhymes worked better than stories and songs, no doubt because they were already part of the children's culture, and therefore well matched in terms of complexity and

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[6] It was this fascinating book, which successfully weds speculation and research-based argumentation, that originally led me to Alison Wray's work on formulaic language.

adapted to their level of cognitive and first language development. Some of the children even went on to "teach" the foreign-language rhymes to other children on the playground, a perfect illustration of the transfer from teacher-to-child transmission to peer-to-peer transmission.

Children's folklore, as heard on the playground and in other places where adult supervision is limited, is an integral part of the target culture and to neglect it is to run the risk of teaching a bland aseptic textbook variety of the target language. While it is legitimate to teach the vocabulary and structures used by children in their interactions with teachers, parents and other adults, it is also necessary and probably motivating to draw on the language of the peer group, which may deviate from that of other age groups. As some of the examples above have shown, formulaic expressions used by English-speaking children in their play and folklore often have equivalents in French. Beyond obvious cultural and linguistic specificities, there is considerable evidence that children share many similar rituals, routines, communication goals and meanings across cultures (Arleo & Delalande 2010). However, they need to learn how to express these in the target language. A first step might be to raise awareness about children's oral traditions and vernacular speech in teacher-training courses. In the classroom, cross-curricular projects involving language awareness might be carried out, involving not only the target language, but also of varieties of the native language (e.g. social and geographical variation) or other foreign languages spoken in the community. For example, pupils might collect formulaic language used on the playground, classify and analyse it, and then, with the help of the teacher, look for foreign-language equivalents.

How does formulaic language fit into this picture? "Trying to make it real" also refers to an excessive emphasis on novelty and constant creativity in language use (see section 3), suggesting that both learners and teachers might benefit from developing their formulaic competence from which creative and idiomatic language may flourish (provide note on A. Chanel?). As we have seen, children's folklore is highly formulaic, usually learned holistically, and often linked to the body via rhythm and movement. Some teachers, however, may see their primary role as developing analytical skills in learners. Consequently, material is often broken down in the belief that this will lead to more effective learning. The Needs Only Analysis, however, suggests that learners break down sequences only when necessary, and this has been independently confirmed for musical and movement patterns found on the playground in several cultures (Marsh 2006). What are the pedagogical implications? Perhaps teachers should incorporate in their teaching routines some of the holistic embodied learning strategies that are observed in real interactions among children, and resist the temptation to systematically cut up sequences that must subsequently be assembled from bottom up, which incurs processing costs. For example, in teaching a song or a rhyme it may not always be useful to break down the lyric line by line in order to achieve a polished final product in one or two sessions. An alternative strategy would be to gradually learn the item holistically over a longer period of time. At first, this may seem to favor fluency at the expense of accuracy. However, the observation of handclapping performances, for instance, show how regular playful rehearsal leads gradually to greater accuracy in a non-threatening way, where players may progress at their own pace. Once the items have been fully integrated by the learner, more analytical strategies involving writing skills may then be built on a solid foundation through teacher and peer scaffolding. Older children, for instance, may enjoy creating

illustrated songbooks or multilingual booklets on children's folklore. Websites might be developed on the cross-cultural comparison of children's rhymes.[7] Such projects, because they involve writing, develop metalinguistic and cognitive skills, allowing children to explore their curiosity about language.

5. Conclusion: developing cross-disciplinary perspectives

The study of children's folklore, like research on formulaic language, necessarily involves cross-disciplinary collaboration, as no one researcher can claim to master all the relevant fields of study required to achieve an indepth comprehension of such a complex subject. This article has drawn primarily on work developed in the fields of folklore studies, linguistics and ethnomusicology. Not being a specialist of formulaic language, I have depended mainly on Wray (2002 & 2008) for reliable information in this area. One unfortunate consequence of the necessary but sometimes extreme specialisation of research is that scholars working in one field are unaware of developments in other fields that are directly relevant to their own work. This is true of researchers working on oral traditions (e.g., Taft 2006) who are unfamiliar with the systematic study of formulaic language that has developed over the last decades and who might benefit from such an approach. In the other direction, this paper has tried to show that the study of children's folklore might also be of interest to formulaic language specialists. The link to foreign language learning and teaching requires additional bridge-crossing, as this discipline draws on other forms of scholarship as well. Fortunately, there are enough common threads within these different academic fields to weave a coherent story if researchers are willing to speak to each other across conventional academic boundaries.

This paper has highlighted the role of rhythm in several genres of children's folklore, suggesting that the presence of certain basic rhythmic patterns might be added to the diagnostic criteria for formulaicity. I have also argued that certain conclusions regarding isochrony in speech (Patel 2008) may be based on limited research data that does not take into account the frequency of formulaic language. Finally, I have suggested how formulaic children's folklore might contribute to the evolution of teaching practices in the foreign language classroom of primary schools, in order to make language learning more "real," i.e. closer to children's everyday experience. As Alison Wray points out in the lead article in this volume, further breakthroughs in any field often require both mastery of the relevant literature as well as adopting new perspectives: "One has to compare, contrast, make links. One has to ask, for instance, whether a particular claim or assumption in one domain can really be true, given what we know about another domaine" (pp. xx). I hope that this exploratory paper, written by a children's folklorist with an "outsider" perspective in relation to formulaic language scholarship, will encourage other researchers to pursue a potentially fruitful cross-disciplinary avenue of study.

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[7] See for example the website on a counting-out rhymes research project, created by Italian schoolteacher Mauro Presini and his pupils at the "Bruno Ciari" Primary School in Cocomaro di Cona, Ferrara, Italy: http://kidslink.bo.cnr.it/cocomaro/conteloe.htm

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