

# Prefabricated phrases in young learners' oral language

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A new doctoral dissertation by Parvin Gheitasi at Umeå University explores the different functions of prefabricated phrases in young learners' oral language production. These phrases provided learners with an instrument to overcome their lack of knowledge, to improve their fluency, and to enjoy some language play.

"The young learners in this study remind us that it could be frustrating and sometimes demotivating to be in an environment where one cannot communicate easily due to lack of words and/or a low proficiency level in language structure," says Parvin Gheitasi, doctoral student at the Department of Language Studies, and continues:

"Yet, they suggest that one could accept this challenge and try to enjoy both learning something new and becoming part of a community. They show how to be observant and attentive to the input from the more competent language users and pick up some prefabricated [phrases](#) to be able to produce an utterance, which could be fluent and accurate."

Parvin Gheitasi further explains that the young learners in the study remind us about the advantages of applying these prefabs to buy planning time; to boost confidence and to be able to engage in a conversation when one does not feel ready to construct an utterance. They believed that language is a fun game. Playing with sounds helps us to remember the phrase more easily.

"Moreover, they introduced a fun play with language, characterising it as

a game similar to Lego where one can pick a piece from a bunch and replace it with other pieces with a similar shape but probably different colour. By deviating from the established constructions one can practice with language and at the same time enjoy the fun."

"All in all, these learners indicated that language learning is not always 'sunny and hot' it can also be 'sunny and rainy'!"

This study explored the different functions of prefabricated phrases in young learners' oral language production. These phrases provided learners with an instrument to overcome their lack of knowledge, to improve their fluency, and to enjoy playing with language. The use of these phrases was affected by the learners' relationship with their peers and also the relationship between the learners and their teacher.

"Language users might adopt a role model and pick up the language from their role model. Sometimes the role model is the teacher and sometimes the [role model](#) can be a peer. In sum, [language learning](#) has much to do with picking up phrases or sentences from a role model and it can be justified by the individual's desire to be understood and to be part of a community."

It was observed that although all the learners of this study applied prefabricated phrases in their language production, there was great variation among individual learners in their practices and intentions. Some learners used these phrases to be able to extend their utterances and produce more of the language, whereas other learners used them to avoid further language production (e.g. by using the phrase 'I don't know', they could limit their [language production](#)).

"Sometimes learners were conservative and stuck to their set phrases, and sometimes they enjoyed playing with the norms and had fun practicing with [language](#). All in all, it seemed that individual [learners](#)'

different personalities, needs or limitations served as explanation for the application of set phrases in different contexts.

**More information:** "Say It Fast, Fluent and Flawless": formulaicity in the oral language production of young foreign language learners.

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