Formulaic Expressions of *Yes-No* Responses in English as a Second Language: A Case Study of Japanese-Speaking Children

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the developmental pattern of two children in their second language (L2) acquisition through formulaic expressions. The two children had had some prior knowledge of English, and lived in the state of Tennessee in the U.S.A. from July 2000 to January 2003. For the purpose of this study, I tape-recorded interviews of each child by native speakers of English during their stay. The other data came from the textbooks they had studied with in Japan.

The approaches to the description of learner language tend to focus on only distinctive features in phonology and morphemes in syntax. These grammatical units are easy to classify and analyze, and additionally serve to minimize the number and size of the basic units. However, the units children produce are functional units measured "by occurrence of invariant combinations, fluency of production, or characteristic intonation contours" (Peters, 1983: 2). For example, Ito and Hatch (1978) tried to count the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) of the participant, Takahiro, a 2-year-old Japanese boy, when he said, "This is a blue." They could not count the morphemes because they were sure that "this is a" was not three morphemes for him, but one. In another case, Hakuta (1976) studied the order of the acquisition of grammatical morphemes. The data suggested that his participant, Uguisu, a 5-year-old Japanese girl, acquired present progressive at the earliest, followed by *didn't*, 3rd person

irregular, *in, to,* and so on. The other side of his data showed that she acquired articles in phonological sequences with verbs (e.g. *look-like-a*) and prepositions (e.g. *in-a*). The article *a* in these examples is not separable from the verb or the preposition, and it is difficult to ascertain that she acquired the usage of articles.

The multiword strings described above play an important role in L2 acquisition. These units consist of an unanalyzable string of frequently recurring sounds, which in this paper we will refer to as formulaic expressions. In spite of the fact that the use of them is an important strategy, analysis of formulaic expressions in longitudinal case studies is rare. Therefore, the purpose of the study documented in this paper is to examine what formulaic expressions the children acquire and how the formulaic expressions affect their speech.

1. Formulaic Expressions

Because formulaic expressions cannot be analyzed by language grammar, more than 50 labels have been created for them - *imitation* by Ervin-Tripp (1978), *amalgam* by Bohn (1986), *lexical phrases* by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), *ready-made chunks* by Ellis (1994) - to name but a few. For this reason, the definition for this paper needs to be clarified carefully. Bohn (1986) defines formulaic expressions as "syntactically unanalyzed strings," which "are used to refer to a lack of structuring on the morphosyntactic level" (1986: 186). Although formulaic expressions are acquired as a string of words, is it impossible for them to be analyzed by a speaker? Krashen and Scarcella (1978: 284) assert that formulaic expressions are similar to automatic speech (AS) and are not to be included in the process of learning grammar. AS is localized in both the right and left sides of the brain, while prepositional language is lateralized to the left hemisphere. The patient who has suffered left brain damage can often use AS but does not utter creative language.

On the other hand, Ellis (1994) learned that *I don't know* is combined with other formulas to make sentences such as *That one I don't know. I don't know what's this.* At the same time, *I don't know* is broken down and attached to similar but different expressions: *I don't understand. I don't like.* He concluded that the formulaic expressions were "slowly unpackaged, releasing valuable information, which is fed into the knowledge system the learner uses to produce and understand creative speech" (1994: 87). The majority of the researchers (e.g. Braine, 1976; Hakuta, 1976; Nelson, 1981; Rescorla & Okuda, 1987) assert formulaic expressions can be analyzed and will lead to creative constructions.

The form of formulaic expressions is fixed in structure, and the situation is also fixed. Koike (1983) said, "All the expressions the children [Sachiko (5-year-old), Jun (7-year-old), and Nobi (10-year-old)] understood for the first time, are tentatively or forever formulaic expressions appropriate to particular contexts" (1983: 101). They used formulaic expressions in agreement/disagreement (*Yes, Yeah, No, I don't know*), greetings (*Everybody, good-bye, How do you do? Hi!*), sympathy (*Gosh! Oh, my!*), gratitude (*Thank you*), summon (*Hey!*) and hostility (*Quit it! Shut up!*) (1983: 115). These formulaic expressions mentioned above are related to social contacts. In another case, after the participant, Fatmath, 19-year-old Saudi woman, acquired *see you*, Hanania and Gradman (1977) tried to lead her to combine it with *I can* to form *I can see you*, which confused her. *See you* was only uttered when parting, meaning, "I'll be seeing you," for her (1977: 79).

Krashen and Scarcella (1978) classified formulaic expressions into two categories: prefabricated routines and prefabricated patterns. Prefabricated routines are memorized wholes, so the form is fully fixed and invariable (e.g. *I don't know*), whereas prefabricated patterns contain a partially unanalyzed chunk with one or more open slots (e.g. *Can I have a...?*) (1978: 283-4). There are many documented examples of prefabricated patterns. For example, Atsuko, a

5-year-old Japanese girl, described objects using the construction frame of Modifier + Pronoun (*one*) such as *pink one, baby one, dress one, spoon one* and so on. (Rescorla & Okuda, 1987: 288-90). Other examples are *more* + X, *all* + X, *other* + X, (Braine, 1976), *Look at..., Let's...* (Aichiba, 2003), *This is my* + *Noun*, *You are* + *Noun* (M. Yoshida, 1978).

The definition of formulaic expressions in this study is taken from Weinert's (1995) because it covers the major features as we have seen in the review. She defines them as "multi-word or multi-form strings which are produced or recalled as a whole chunk, much like an individual lexical item, rather than being generated from individual lexical items/forms with linguistic rules" (1995: 182). And they are phonologically coherent, situationally dependent, as well as idiosyncratically, inappropriately and frequently used (1995: 182-3).

A number of researchers have discussed the importance of formulaic expressions. Hakuta said the formulaic expressions enable "learners to express functions which they are yet unable to construct from their linguistic system, simply storing them in a sense like large lexical items" (1976: 333). For example, the participant of Huang and Hatch (1978) uttered a lot of well-formed sentences such as *Are you ready? See you tomorrow, Excuse me, Hold my hand* after six weeks of English exposure while he uttered *that +++ bus, Ball +++ no* at the same time. They concluded that the well-formed sentences were imitations and ill-formed ones were rule-formed. Pawley and Syder (1983) argued that "the concepts of memorized sentence and lexicalized sentence stem as elements of linguistic knowledge are necessary for native control" (1983: 205). Wray (2000) added other functions as "a shortcutting device, [...], a tool of social interaction, and a productive function. Without processing time and effort, the speaker can focus attention elsewhere, for example, on the social aspects or discourse" (2000: 474).

Formulaic expressions are seen more commonly in an L2 learner's speech than in that of a native speaker (e.g. Pawley & Syder, 1983; McLaughlin, 1985;

Rescorla & Okuda, 1987; Ellis, 1994). Wong-Fillmore (1976, cited in Vihman, 1982: 269) calculated the use of clear formulaic expressions by five children covered from 52% to 100% of their whole utterances at the early stages. L2 learners, who are usually older than L1 learners, have had greater memory span and have already had experience with their first language, which helps them analyze the syntax and the meaning of formulaic expressions (Huang & Hatch, 1978: 131). L2 learners also have strong motivation to communicate with L2-speaking peers. (Rescorla & Okuda, 1987: 282). We have seen many case studies of children, but formulaic expressions are found in adult cases, too. Bardovi-Harlig (2002) studied 16 adults on the expression of futurity: *will* and *going to*, and concluded "learners can employ formulas at any stage" (2002: 198).

Among all the case studies I have examined, there were not any participants who had prior knowledge of English. It is true that the participants have to be in an English-speaking environment for a researcher to study L2 acquisition. However, there are many cases in which individuals studied English in a classroom setting before moving to an English-speaking country, where they will acquire English as an L2. Other problems I found in the prior studies were that there were few explanations about the reasons why the participants used the specific formulaic expressions in their utterances, and that the utterances the interviewer or the interlocutor made to the participant were not analyzed. Tarone and Liu (1995: 116-9) compared the utterances the participant, Bob, 5-year-old Chinese boy, made with classroom peers, teachers, and the researcher. They found that new structures appeared first in the interactions with the researcher. Achiba (2003: 176-7) also studied the participant talking with a peer, a teenager, and her mother, and found that the participant's strategy for requesting varied and depended on social status. When the addresser had a great influence on the addressee's utterances, there must have been a difference in the ways the addresser spoke to them.

Many approaches to analyzing formulaic expressions were reviewed, and

some problems of the previous case studies were found. The major concerns of this paper are the forms and functions of formulaic expressions the children uttered. In order to keep the same situations, this study focuses on the responses to *yes-no* questions. Two research questions are formed to fit into the frame of this study and reinforce the missing data on prior case studies.

(1) When the children answer *yes-no* questions, how do formulaic expressions they learned and acquired in Japan transform or not transform in forms?

(2) What formulaic expressions do the children acquire in the English environment? And what are their functions and meanings?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study are my daughter Nao and my son Kento. Nao was twelve and Kento was nine years old when they arrived in the U.S.A. Both of them had some previous knowledge on English because they had attended English classes once a week in Japan, Nao for nine years and Kento for five years. Just before leaving for the U.S., Nao passed the 4th grade and Kento did the 5th grade test [1] given by the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP). Nao went to local middle and high school, and Kento to elementary and middle school in the U.S. They attended ESL classes the schools provided for one year. To supplement their ESL classes I asked a college student to help with their homework for one hour once a week for one year.

2.2. Data

There are two sets of data in this study. One is the textbooks the children used in English classes in Japan. The other is recorded data, on which my analysis is focused.

Nao used five main textbooks and Kento four. In the first two textbooks Nao studied with, the phrases or utterances were not repeated, so she did not

remember any set phrases or sentences, but understood the words or sentences. The next series both Nao and Kento used, *Learning World*[2] adopted a strategy of intensive memorization of songs, parodies, chants and repeated questions. Both children remembered and could recite many of the set phrases or sentences, so formulaic expressions were extracted from these *Learning World* Series.

The recorded data for this study were collected over two and a half years at their house in Tennessee, U.S.A. There were eight interview sessions with each child. The interviewer of the first three sessions was a non-native speaker of English, myself, and those of the next five were three different native English speakers. They were all female, twenty years old, students at the University of Tennessee. Each recording session consisted of a two-hour interview. I set the tape and left the room so that I would not interrupt or intentionally prompt the children. Only English was spoken in all the sessions. Each session was performed with the children answering the questions the interviewer asked, reading a book and answering questions based on the reading, and carrying on ordinary conversations. The contents of the questions were prepared by the researcher and handed to the interviewer beforehand. They were about her/himself, academic subjects, hobbies, friends, and school and daily life in the U.S.A. All the utterances of each child and interviewer in the recordings were transcribed in their original form.

2.3. Data Analysis

First, all the responses to *yes-no* questions were taken from *Learning World* Series. The children did not acquire those responses in a natural environment, so the definition of formulaic expressions needed to be modified when identifying them. I chose only the responses that appeared more than five times in the textbooks and that the children could recite without a pause. Following the classification by Krashen and Scarcella (1978: 283-4), the complete

responses that the children could utter with phonological coherence were tentatively classified as prefabricated routines, and the responses that the children could utter partly as a chunk were tentatively classified as prefabricated patterns. To be distinguished from those the children acquired in the U.S.A., the formulaic expressions they had acquired in Japan were named old prefabricated routines and old prefabricated patterns.

Secondly, all the recorded sessions were divided into four time periods from Time 1 to Time 4 so that each Time would be about six to eight months apart, and each set of question and answer was numbered. For the purpose of the study, *yes-no* questions and their answers were taken. *Yes-no* questions are the questions whose answer is expected to be either *yes* (affirmative) or *no* (negative). Even when the sentence did not form a question, it was placed into the *yes-no* question category if the interviewer intended to ask for the answer of either *yes* or *no*. [1] and [2] show the examples of the set of a *yes-no* question and its answer. N3-1.3 in [1] means that this set was taken from Nao's utterances in Time 3, the first session, and the 3rd turn. J is the initial for the interviewer in Time 3. Kento's utterances start with the initial K as in [2].

[1]   N3-1.3   J: Do you miss Japan?

                         N: No. I don't wanna go back to Japan.

[2]   K3-1.42   J: Just study like notes or something?

                         K: Yes.

The answers according to the questions were divided into direct answers to the question and additional utterances. In the example [1], *no* is the direct answer, and *I don't wanna go back to Japan* is an additional utterance. The direct answers were our major concern in this study. Formulaic expressions in the direct answers were extracted according to the frequency and the phonological coherence, and classified into old and new prefabricated routines and patterns. New prefabricated routines and patterns are what the children acquired in the U.S.A.

Finally, to examine the functions and the meanings of the formulaic expressions the children acquired, the range to be examined expanded to the children's and the interviewers' intention and goal behind the actual utterances. This analysis was involved in discourse area. I adopted the measurement with [±certainty] in the category Stubbs (1983: 105-6) claimed to examine the meanings of the formulaic expressions.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter discusses main findings to answer each research question. The section of Old Formulaic Expressions tries to answer the research question 1. The section of New Formulaic Expressions answers the research question 2.

3.1. Old Formulaic Expressions

Table 1 shows the results of the old prefabricated routines and patterns found in the responses to *yes-no* questions. N and K in the table stand for Nao and Kento respectively.

Table 1. Old Formulaic Expressions in Responses to *Yes-No* Questions

Formulaic Expressions	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3		Time 4	
	N	K	N	K	N	K	N	K
Old Prefabricated Routines								
Yes, I do.	7	12	1					
Yes.	2	6	7	3		22	16	55
No.		3	2	7	1	2	9	21
Yes, yes (more than twice)						1	6	
No, no. (more than twice)							8	
Old Prefabricated Patterns								
Yes, S+V		1						1
No, S+V	1	2						
Total	10	24	10	10	2	24	39	77

There are three main findings on old prefabricated routines and patterns. They are 1) *Yes, I do* was the only prefabricated routine in the tentative prefabricated routines I had predicted. 2) The full sentences of the old

prefabricated routines and the old prefabricated patterns decreased rapidly. 3) Even though the form was the same, the function of yes and no expanded in Time 3 and 4.

3.1.1. Domination of *Yes, I do*

Yes, I do dominated in Time 1 for both children as seen in Table 1. There was a 'correct' way to answer *yes-no* questions when the children studied English in Japan, and they were enforced to answer with those formulas. For example, if the question is *Do you have a pet?* the answer should be either *Yes, I do* or *No, I don't*. And, the children followed the instruction that they had learned in Japan. Interestingly, however, nothing was said in addition to *Yes, I do*, not even a word. In other words, it was all they could answer. [3] and [4] show the answer of each child in Time 1.

[3]   N1-2.7   Y: Do you go to school in Knoxville?

                          N: *Yes, I do.*

[4]   K1-2.4   Y: Do you like America?

                          K: *Yes, I do.*

When the children answered with the other patterns of *Yes/No, S + V*, it took much time and they made an error in the sentence. For example, it took Kento six seconds to say *no* in [5], and he was confused with the pronoun and could not finish the sentence. When the interviewer asked the same question with *IS SHE* stressed, he could answer it with a complete sentence after 1.3 seconds.

[5]   K1-1.10   Y: Is she (=Kento's homeroom teacher) strict?

                          K: [After 6.1"] *No, he... No, she....*

           K1-1.11   Y: IS SHE strict?

                          K: *No, she isn't.*

In the example [6], thinking for more than four seconds, Kento chose *did* from his knowledge base, and said, "Yes, I did." The interviewer corrected his

error, but he probably did not understand the connection between *don't* in the question and *do* in the answer, so his repetition had a rising intonation. This error implies that the prefabricated routine *Yes, I do* has bonds to the question *Do you...?*

[6]   K1-1.7   Y: Don't you like English?

         K: [After 4.4"] *Yes, I did.*

         K1-1.8   Y: Yes, I do.

         K: *Yes, I do?* [with a rising intonation]

3.1.2. Shortened Answers

The sole old prefabricated routine *Yes, I do* and a few old prefabricated patterns disappeared suddenly from their utterances after Time 2. The direct answers shortened to *yes* or *no* alone, but there was often an additional sentence to give an explanation after *yes* or *no* as in [7] in Time 3. It means that their responses focused on the content rather than on the sentence structure.

[7]   K3-1.35   J: Was it different in school?

         K: Yes. It was more harder.

In the example [8] Kento answered with a full sentence of an old prefabricated pattern in Time 4. It was easy for him to remember this pattern because the interviewer uttered the segments in her tag question that he needed in the answer.

[8]   K4-1.77   S: So...So when you were here, I know Bearden Middle School
                         doesn't have language program, does it?

         K: *Yes, it does.* They have French and Spanish.

The example [8] tells that at the first sight, the formulaic expressions the children acquired in Japan seemed to vanish completely from their utterances, but they were stored in their heads and came out when they were needed.

3.1.3. New Function

Yes and *no* were sometimes repeated more than once in Nao's speech in Time 3 and 4. Since she uttered those multiple *yes*'s or *no*'s with a louder and faster tone, either affirmation or negation was emphasized as seen in [9] and [10].

[9]　　N4-1.38　N: ...We don't write a paper in Japan, Japanese school.

　　　　N4-1.39　S: You don't type it.

　　　　　　　　N: *No. No. No.*

[10]　　N4-1.63　S: So you...you know, had more individual friends?

　　　　　　　　N: *Yes. Yes.*

3.1.4. Other Findings

There was no example of *No, I don't* in the children's responses, which means it was not a prefabricated routine. When the children answered with a negative form, they used *no* alone. Why did the children not use *No, I don't*? One of the reasons likely lies in the way the interviewers handled the questions. In Time 1 and 2 when the prefabricated routine *Yes, I do* remained, the interviewers biased the questions favorable to the children and they lost the opportunities to use *No, I don't*. [11] is an example in Time 2.

[11]　　K2-1.14　F: What did you do on your Christmas break?

　　　　　　　　K: ...

　　　　K2-1.15　F: Did you sleep?

　　　　　　　　K: Yes.

　　　　K2-1.16　F: Did you study?

　　　　　　　　K: A little.

　　　　K2-1.17　F: Did you work on English? Did you study English?

　　　　　　　　K: No.

　　　　　　　　F: Yes, you did.

The interviewer F in [11] asked questions, expecting Kento to answer in the affirmative so that he could answer them easily. It is no wonder that she

emphasized and said, *Yes, you did* at the end. As another reason, negative sentences often had to have an explanation or a reason why their answer was negative, so the children needed to think elsewhere rather than the actual response to the *yes-no* questions. [12] in Time 4 shows that Kento explained why he did not care for the piano right after saying *no*.

[12]   K4-1.57   S: And that one (=piano), you didn't care for that (=playing the piano)?

K: No. I like piano too, but I like guitar better.

Some *yes-no* questions do not expect for the mere answer of *yes* or *no*. Nakamura (1984) suggests that there are many cases in which *yes* or *no* should be avoided or does not have to be uttered. For example, the questions below contain other intentions the speaker has besides *yes* or *no*.

e.g.   Can I offer you a drink? (offer)

May I have the ashtray? (request)

Would you like some coffee? (invitation) (1984: 1278-82)

To answer these questions, the respondent needs to understand the meaning of the actual sentence as well as what the speaker wants to know. In Time 1 Nao misunderstood this kind of question.

[13]   N1-1.11   Y: Can you tell me your friends' names?

N: Uh-huh.

N1-1.12   Y: Please tell me your friends' names.

N: My friends' name is Mercedes, Rachel [...].

The interviewer in [13] wanted to know her friends' names, but Nao took it as a usual *yes-no* question. In Time 2, however, she followed the interviewer's intention as in [14].

[14]   N2-1.23   F: Can you tell me, in English, of this book, something clear

outer space is about?

N: OK. This is um.. this book umm, this book, this story about..

Although she could not construct her utterance after saying *OK*, Nao understood that she was requested to explain about the book.

3.2. New Formulaic Expressions

Table 2 shows the new formulaic expressions that the children uttered in their responses to *yes-no* questions. "Other phrases or sentences" include the formulaic expressions that would be difficult to be replaced with *yes* or *no* because the meaing would be changed. Some of them consist of a whole sentence and others a part of the sentence. The parentheses in the table show the number of the times to be uttered by each child. The numbers of them are small. However, since those listed formulaic expressions appeared in their additional utterances as well, they were counted as formulaic expressions.

Table 2. New Prefabricated Routines in Responses to *Yes-No* Questions

Times		Substitutions of *yes*	Substitutions of *no*	Other phrases or sentences	Total
Time 1	N	*uh-huh* (1)			1
	K			*I don't know* (1)	1
Time 2	N	*uh-huh* (1), *OK* (1)		*I mean* (1)	3
				a little (1)	1
Time 3	N	*yeah* (6), *yeah, yeah* (1)	*well, no* (1)		8
	K			*sometimes* (1) *little bit* (1)	2
Time 4	N	*right* (13), *yeah* (21) *right, right* (4), *uh-huh* (6)	*not at all* (3) *not really* (1) *though* (2)	*kind of* (2), *I know* (2) *maybe* (1), *I mean* (1) *like* (1)	57
	K		*not at all* (2) *not really* (2)	*I think so* (1), *kind of* (1) *I don't know* (1), *I think* (1) *just* (1), *like* (1)	10

Table 2 does not have the section for new prefabricated patterns because any new patterns of the direct responses to *yes-no* questions did not appear in any of the four Times. There may be two reasons to explain this result. One is that the children had already learned all the possible patterns to answer *yes-no* questions in Japan. The possible patterns indicate the form of *Yes/No*, S + V. And the other reason is that the children stopped using the full sentences after Time 1, but just answered with *yes* or *no* alone. They tended to focus on the contents after saying *yes* or *no*.

Major findings in new prefabricated routines were as follows. 1) Substitutions of *yes* had more functions than *yes*. 2) Many of the new formulaic expressions showed the meanings between *yes* and no or extreme *no*.

3.2.1. More Functions of *uh-huh*, *yeah*, and *right*

Uh-huh was the first prefabricated routine for Nao to show the affirmation besides *yes*. It appeared in the first session in Time 1, which was one month after our arrival to the U.S. In Time 1 and 2, *uh-huh* was only used for the affirmation of *yes-no* questions. In Time 4, the usage expanded and Nao put it between the interviewer's set of talks as a sign that I am listening.

[15]   N4-1.69   S: [...] I remember I...umm...I went to a club meeting.

                       N: *Uh-huh.*

                       S: And they were showing tapes from different countries, and

                       one of them was Japanese.

                       N: *Uh-huh.*

These two *uh-huh's* in [15] were not counted as the direct answers to *yes-no* questions, but they worked as an indicator given out by the listener.

Yes was completely replaced by *yeah* in Nao's answers in Time 3. Although it is not certain why she said *yeah* and never said *yes*, one thing that we can speculate is that Jill, the interviewer in Time 3, looked younger than the other interviewers, and Nao felt as if she had been a friend of hers at school. This domination of *yeah* was temporary because it was lost in Time 4, when other substitutions of *yes* appeared and *yes* came back as well. Kento never used *yeah* in the interviews. I had often heard him say *yeah* when talking to his friends, so probably he was more nervous in front of an interviewer than Nao.

The frequency of *yeah* and *right* increased in Nao's answers in Time 3 and 4. These new prefabricated routines could be replaced by *yes*, but they often fell in the middle or at the end of Nao's speech, which were not always direct answers to *yes-no* questions. The examples from [16] to [18] were taken from Time 3

when Nao extensively used *yeah*.

[16]   N3-1.24   J: Wow, Spanish?

N: *Yeah* (a), I, you can take Spanish and... Spanish or French for one year like a full year...[...]. It's good though. And, *yeah* (b), I like Spanish and band.

[17]   N3-1.29   N: I have to study Japanese again. *Yeah* (c). This is... you have to like you have to prove, [...] And there is a rule to do, you know in Japanese sentence thingy, you have to put like, first oh, *yeah* (d) that thingy I don't get it I can't memorize them all.

These *yeah's* above possess several functions. (a) is the answer to the question. (b) integrates her topic by going back to the original response. (c) is a filler between the sentences. (d) is a sign to remember something, meaning "that reminds me." Nao also used *yeah* to mean that she agreed the interviewer's statement or to tell the interviewer she was listening as in [18].

[18]   N3-1.27   J: ... And so then when we went to uh, when I went to a high school, it was like repeating. So it was good.

N: *Yeah*.

Yeah's of (b), (c), and (d) in [17] were not the direct answer to *yes-no* questions, so they were not counted, but they showed other functions that *yeah* employed. The functions explained in [16] through [18] refer to discourse markers by Schiffrin (1987), which defines as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units to talk" (1987: 31). Other examples include *you know, I mean, kind of, like,* and *just*. The usage of them is often criticized in the dictionaries as "misuse," "vulgar," or "questionable construction" (e.g. *Fowler's A Dictionary of Modern English Usage.* 1965: 334-6). Though in formal speech or writing this is true, these discourse markers function in casual speech to give extra time to construct the main point, to communicate well with others, and to give an indirect response (Schiffrin, 1987).

In the Japanese language, *yes* is used for the agreement and *no* is for

disagreement whether the sentence structure is affirmative or negative. English *yes* is basically used for an affirmative sentence and *no* for a negative. Since the children had learned this usage and acquired it, there was no problem to distinguish between with *yes* and *no* from the beginning of their stay in the U.S. However, as another usage, when *yes* and *no* become ambiguous in negative or embedded questions, the polarity between *yes* and *no* becomes ambiguous. Stubbs calls this usage Free Variation (1983: 114-5). For example, when the main sentence has one polarity and the embedded sentence has the other as below, both *yes* and *no* work as free variation.

e.g.　　A: And I think I'm probably right in assuming that there are no further objections.

　　　　B: Yes/No. (1983: 114)

Yes in the above response can meet the polarity of the main sentence meaning *yes, you are right*, whereas *no* refers to *no, there are not further objections, so you are right* (1983: 114). Consequently, both *yes* and *no* can have the same polarity. The children acquired free variation in Time 4.

[19]　　N4-1.65　S: So you didn't really...

　　　　　　　　N: I didn't speak English...

　　　N4-1.66　S:　　　　　　　　　....right away.

　　　　　　　　N: *Yeah. I...Right.*

　　　　　　　　I really didn't speak English...

The question of [19] is a negative sentence, so Nao could respond with *no*, but she said *yeah*. This is free variation. Both *yeah* and *right* here meant that what the interviewer said was correct.

3.2.2. Uncertain Polarity

When a *yes-no* question is uttered, it is not always the case that the answer shows the polarity in a daily conversation. A speaker may think that the definite answer would be too strong, so s/he would try to imply affirmation or negation with other phrases or sentences to make it weak. There are other cases when

the respondent does not know the answer or when the question does not really have a *yes-no* answer. For these cases, many new prefabricated routines played an important role to give uncertain answers. For example, Kento uttered two new prefabricated routines to answer *yes-no* questions in Time 1 and 2 as seen in [20] and [21].

[20]   K.1-1.5   Y: Do you miss Japan?

K: ... *I don't know.*

[21]   K.2-1.17   F: Did you study?

K: *A little.*

After more than six seconds, Kento answered *I don't know* in [20]. He told me later that he did not know what the word *miss* meant. Saying *I don't know* was his strategy for avoiding answering when he could not construct a sentence or when he did not know what the speaker was asking. Although Kento had learned both *I don't know* and *a little* in Japan and known their meanings, he had scarcely had opportunities to answer with these utterances enough to store them as a rote phrase or a sentence in Japan. He started using them so frequently in the U.S. that they became his new prefabricated routines.

The significant change for both children in Time 4 compared to the other three Times is that the range of answers expanded with the new prefabricated routines. The meanings of those new formulaic expressions were used to emphasize the polarity and to express uncertainty of the polarity. The examples below show the variation of the responses. *Not at all* in [22] gives strong negation, *though* and *not really* are for weak negation in [23] and [24], and *kind of* and *I think so* are for weak affirmation in [25] and [26],

[22]   N4-1.79   S: So, it wasn't a total shock, you know, when you came here.

N: *No. No. Not at all.*   [+certainty]

[23]   N4-1.97   S: Oh, you haven't. So, that's interesting.

N: I'd like to try it, *though.*   [-certainty]

[24]   K4-1.41   S: ...Did you find yourself watching basketball game?

	K: *Not really.*		[-certainty]
[25]	K4-1.12	S: Was it (=American school) tough?	
	K: *Kind of.*		[-certainty]
[26]	K4-1.111	S: ...Is that the goal (=to work together with his sister)?	
	K: Yes.		
	S: It is?		
	K: *I think so.*		[-certainty]

Suzuki (1999) examined alternative words for *yes* and *no* in his paper. *Absolutely, certainly, naturally, of course, quite,* and *sure* were among them. He said the similarity among those words was that they had a stronger connotation than *yes* and *no*. The result of this case study was quite contrary to his suggestion, and the alternative words the children used had mostly weak connotation.

3.2.3. Other Findings

When the children did not answer *yes-no* questions with *yes, no,* or any other formulaic expressions, those responses were classified as creative construction. The number of the creative constructions in Nao's responses increased gradually. That of Kento's was low throughout all the Times. Table 3 shows the ratios of the creative constructions in the children's answers to *yes-no* questions.

Table 3. Ratios of the Children's Answers without *Yes/No* or with Substitutions for Them

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
Nao	1/12 (8.3%)	3/16 (18.6%)	3/12 (25%)	27/87 (31.0%)
Kento	0/29 (0%)	1/13 (7.7%)	1/28 (3.6%)	3/85 (3.5%)

Note: The ratios were calculated by dividing the number of the responses that did not contain *yes/no* (or the substitutions) by all the *yes-no* questions in each Time.

Nao responded without saying *yes* or *no* and continued from where the interviewer left off with a conjunction as seen in [27]. In other cases, when Nao thought the answer was obvious, she skipped saying *yes* or *no* as in [28] and

[29].

| [27] | N3-1.32 | J: Oh, really? |

N: *And* when some students speak in English, she says "no, no ingles."

| [28] | N3-1.22 | J: Did you like it? |

N: It's really cool.

| [29] | N4-1.8 | S: You are at West (high school)? |

N: I'm a freshman.

Nao often started with *and* as in [27] or *but* as in [30] after *yes-no* questions from Time 2. The context after *and* follows an affirmative connotation, while *but* follows a negative connotation. *And* and *but* worked as a starter in Nao's utterances.

| [30] | N2-3.1 | F: Really? |

N: *But* she doesn't tell me... .

5. Conclusion

The old prefabricated routines and patterns as complete responses that the children had learned in Japan disappeared or shortened to *yes* or *no* alone. The old formulaic expressions were not acquired from their natural environment. And, also the forms were aiming for grammatical correctness and formality, not practicality. At the beginning of their stay in the U.S.A., the children paid attention to the forms of the sentences they uttered, but later they were concerned more about the contents. On one hand, the complete forms of the responses were fading from Time 2, but on the other they did not disappear from the children's lexicon and would reappear when needed.

Various kinds of new formulaic expressions appeared in their response to *yes-no* questions especially after Time 3 when about a year and a half have passed since the children stayed in the U.S. Some of them were substitutions of *yes* (e.g. *uh-huh, yeah, right*), and substitutions of *no* (e.g. *not really, not at all*). Others gave the vague meanings (e.g. *kind of, maybe, I don't know, I think so*) or

a part of the answer (e.g. *a little, sometimes*). The new formulaic expressions played an important role in giving variations to their *yes* or *no* answers, and they were used to express uncertainty of the polarity or to emphasize the polarity. Many of them could be classified into discourse markers. Although the usage of discourse markers is often considered to be informal or vulgar, the children used them as various functions such as giving a time to construct a sentence, giving an indirect response or ambiguity, or as a filler.

The results of the present study suggest that formulaic expressions play key roles for acquiring and expanding the knowledge of L2 and also for communicating with other people. However, this case study does not cover the developmental sequence - from formulaic expressions, through low-scope pattern, to creative construction - that Ellis (1994: 85-6) proposed. The direct answers to *yes-no* questions were used for this analysis, but there are many additional utterances found in these data. In the future I would like to analyze formulaic expressions on the side of creativity.

Notes

1   According to *Evaluation Standard* of STEP, 4th graders are "capable of understanding basic English on matters concerning one's family and school life, and able to attempt communication to a limited extent," and 5th graders are "able to understand and express themselves in English with limited, fixed expressions."

2   Texts the children used at English classes in Japan:

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