

Benefitting from EFL Immersion: Are Youth and Native Input Sufficient Conditions for Target-Language Convergence?

Brian Vincent Rusk

brian.rusk@gmail.com

Beliefs about the second language learning ability of children

McWhorter, John. (2014, February 2). Let's stop pretending that French is an important language [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116443/new-york-citys-french-dual-language-programs-are-mostly-pointless>

And especially with Chinese, beginning to learn the language at 18, in a freshman course, is too late. Someone with a few years of Spanish can often communicate on at least the basic level of Chris Farley's Matt Foley on SNL, but that's much less likely with Chinese. You have to speak each syllable on one of four tones—*bi* can mean *compare*, *nose*, *than* or *force* depending on the tone. That's easiest for tots with maximally plastic brains and minimal self-consciousness; later, for many, it is simply impossible. Plus, you have to master a few thousand symbols, most of which resemble nothing in particular except one another, in order to even be able to read a newspaper headline or a children's book. Many adults gamely hoping to learn a little Chinese are defeated by the demands of the characters alone. Kids have more time and less else to focus on, and can learn the symbols more as Chinese kids do.

L1 Influence in Early Second Language Acquisition

Established Pattern for Child L2 English Acquisition

- Limited and temporary L1 influence
 - Examples
 - Dulay & Burt (1974a, 1974b)
 - Paradis (2005)

My Observations of Child Immersion Learners in Taiwan

- Significant and lasting L1 influence
 - Examples
 - Topicalization
 - Extended Non-use of articles
 - Extended Non-use of inflections on nouns or verbs

Patterns of Acquisition in Early Second Language Acquisition

Established Pattern for Child L2 English Acquisition

- Infrequent form-choice errors with finite verbs
 - ‘She **are** nice’ is rare
 - ‘She nice’ is common and precedes correct use (as it does in L1A)
 - Paradis, Rice, Crago, & Marquis (2008)
 - Ionin & Wexler (2003)

My Observations of Child Immersion Learners in Taiwan

- Frequent form-choice errors
 - ‘She **are** nice’ is common

Variable Acquisition in Child Second Language Learning

The study:

- Focused just on acquisition and use of BE
- Collected data from learners in preschool immersion in Taipei, Taiwan
- Compared the data to published data for an ESL group in Edmonton, Canada (Paradis *et al.*, 2008)
- Employed the standardized test used in the comparison study – The Test of Early Grammatical Impairment (TEGI; Rice & Wexler, 2001)

Group Comparisons

Means, ranges of age and English exposure for the two learner groups (standard deviation in brackets).

	Taipei Group n=24	Paradis Group n=24*
AGE^a	5;4 (0;8) 4;3-6;8	5:7 (0;11) 4;2-7;10
MOE^b	20.42 (9.15) 8-38	9.5 (3.9) 2-18
Learning Context	EFL	ESL
First Languages	Mandarin	Mandarin/Cantonese (8), Spanish (6), Arabic (3), Farsi (2), Dari, Japanese, Korean, Romanian, Ukrainian (1 each)

^a Years; and months

^b Months of exposure to English

* Data extracted from Paradis *et al.* (2008) & Paradis (2005)

Error Types Under Study

Omission Errors

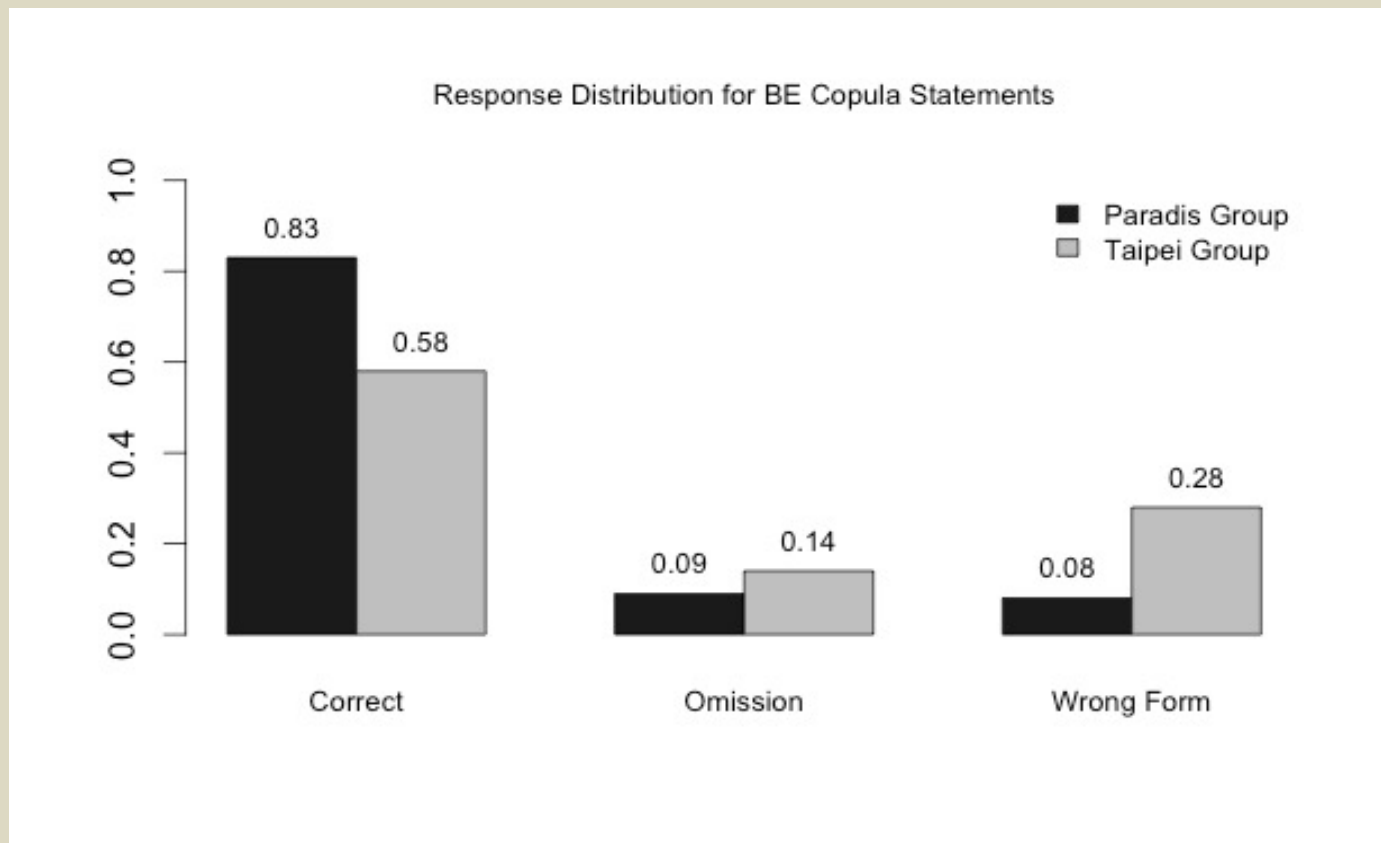
- ‘He \emptyset happy’ or ‘They \emptyset running’

Form-Choice Errors

- ‘She **are** smart’ or ‘They **is** jumping’

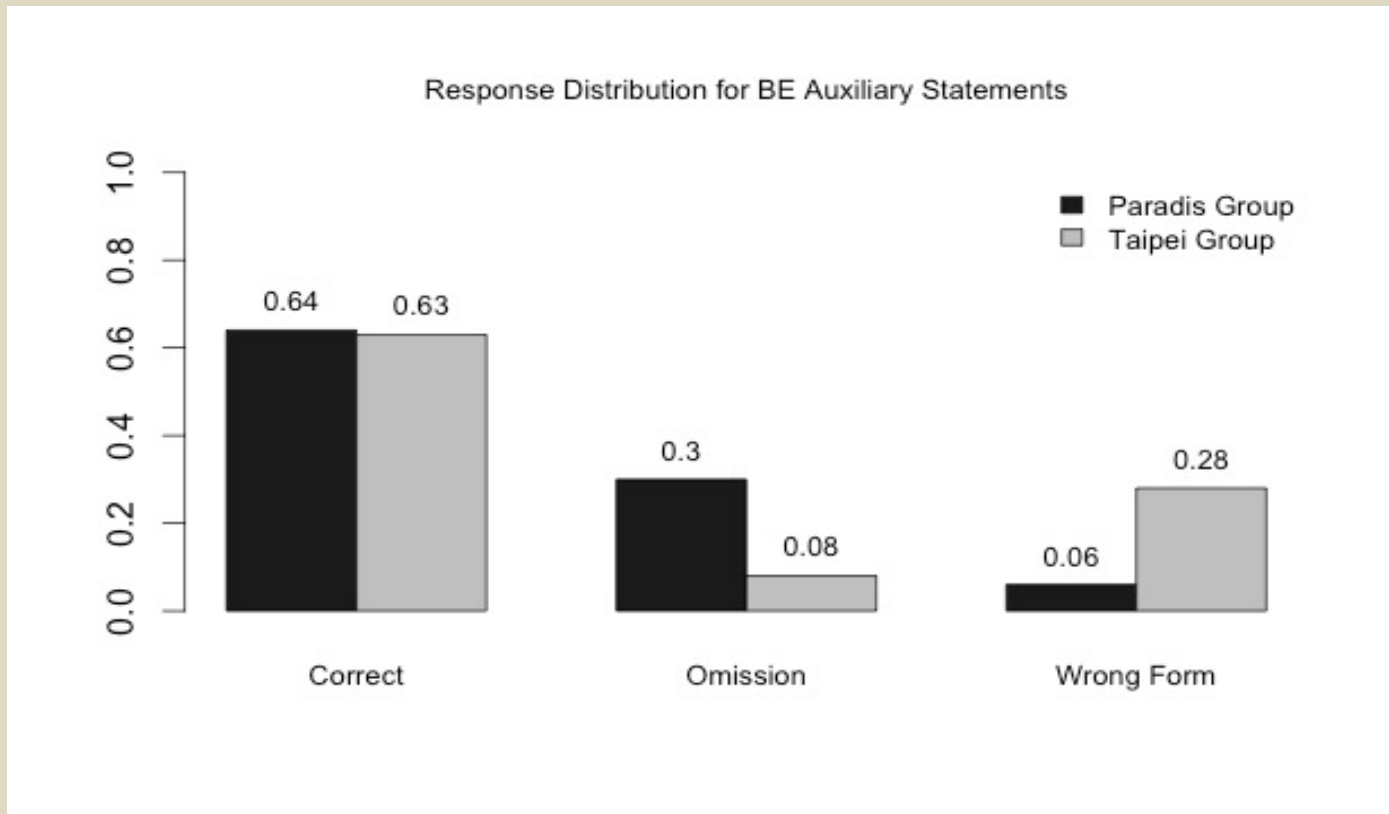
Double Marking

- ‘Are they **are** running?’ or ‘Is she **is** happy?’ (Only applicable to questions)



Response Distribution for BE Copula Statements

e.g., The bears are happy.



Response Distribution for BE Auxiliary Statements

e.g., The cat is sleeping.

... so? Why is this important?

Since Corder (1967), L2 learners' errors have been used to reflect underlying knowledge.

Similar L1A-early L2A error patterns have been taken to support:

- Mechanisms of language acquisition are inherent to children, not to learning context.
- The underlying linguistic knowledge is similar for L1A and early L2A.

How similar are L1A and early L2A? Can we generalize from one to the other?

In L1A

- Predictable stages of acquisition:
 1. Phonetic learning
 2. Word learning
 3. Combining words
 4. **Fairly predictable order of grammatical morpheme emergence (at least for English)**
- There is a predictable outcome

In Early L2A

- L2 learners must learn phonetics, words, and morphosyntax concurrently
 - **Differences exist in patterns of acquisition between learning populations**
- The outcome of early ESL is predictable, but does this generalize to EFL contexts?

In Conclusion

1. Child second language acquisition is not invariable as may be the case for L1A.
2. It is likely, though not proven, that learning context has a significant influence on the role of prior linguistic knowledge.

Implications

1. If childhood is the only time that learners can learn features of typologically distant languages, programs that rely on children's assumed inherent ability to learn divergent features may be wasting the opportunity.
2. Identifying contextual features that foster second language acquisition for children could also benefit adult learners.

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